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The Story of Kate

A Tale of California Life
for Girls

Works of
Pauline Bradford Mackie



Mademoiselle de Berny
A Story of Valley Forge

Ye Lyttle Salem Maide
A Story of Witchcraft

A Georgian Actress

The Washingtonians




L. C. PAGE & COMPANY
200 Summer Street, Boston, Mass.



"CYNTHY WAS LYING LISTLESSLY ON HER PILLOW"

(See page 234)

The Story of Kate

A Tale of California Life for Girls 

By

PAULINE BRADFORD MACKIE



(MRS. HERBERT MÜLLER HOPKINS)

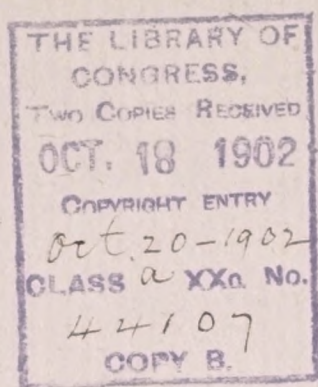
Author of "Mademoiselle de Berny," "Ye Lyttle Salem Maide," "A Georgian Actress," "The Washingtonians," etc.

Illustrated by

L. J. BRIDGMAN



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TO
Edith May Coder
WHO BEST KNOWS KATE'S GOOD POINTS
THIS STORY
IS LOVINGLY INSCRIBED

Contents

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. THE COMING OF THE RAINS	13
II. A GUEST FROM THE FAR NORTH	31
III. KATE'S SACRIFICE	50
IV. ALL NIGHT AT "HIGGINS'S"	70
V. "ROSE MAY SMITH—MILLINER"	90
VI. KATE PROVES HERSELF A DISCIPLINARIAN .	110
VII. IN WHICH THE TWO GIRLS HAVE A TERRIBLE FRIGHT	128
VIII. KATE DECIDES TO BECOME AN ARTIST. .	143
IX. DICKENS IN GREEN HOLLOW	162
X. KATE'S SHIP COMES IN	176
XI. A BARN STUDIO	195
XII. IN SAN FRANCISCO	213
XIII. CYNTHY	230
XIV. A MIDNIGHT ERRAND	245
XV. MR. HITCHCOCK AND ROSE MAY	256

List of Illustrations

	PAGE
"CYNTHY WAS LYING LISTLESSLY ON HER PILLOW"	
(<i>See page 234</i>)	<i>Frontispiece</i>
"KATE SAT ON THE PORCH STEP"	13
"'GOING FOR A CONSTITUTIONAL?' CALLED MRS. HIGGINS, CHEERFULLY"	86
"BUT KATE'S ARMS WENT JUST AS TIGHT AROUND HER"	192



“ KATE SAT ON THE PORCH STEP ”

The Story of Kate

CHAPTER I.

The Coming of the Rains

KATE sat on the porch step, her hands clasped about her knee, as she gazed fixedly off toward the mountains.

John, the old family cat, lay panting at her feet. Every little while he would rise and try to dig a fresh hole in the baked earth at the foot of the rose-vines.

Kate gave him a push with her foot. "Stop digging at those roses," she said crossly.

The north wind was blowing. It was a desert wind, and had an electrical quality which withered the roses and the heliotrope twining about the veranda, and curled up the delicate, fern-like foliage

of the pepper-trees. The six eucalyptus-trees planted in front of the house along the roadway suffered least from the drought, for their roots ran deep and far under the earth until they found water. Still, their drooping, cimeter-shaped leaves were white with dust, and rustled dryly like paper in the howling wind. This always puzzled Kate's mother, who was a New England woman, and who could not reconcile herself to a wind which blew so lustily in a bright blue sky, and moaned down the chimney and rattled the casements. "At home such a wind would be a storm-breeder," she would say, "but here it will blow for a week; then stop as suddenly as it began, without a drop of rain."

Kate's own lips and skin were parched as the flowers, and she felt as though her lids creaked when she closed her eyes.

The sun was low, but the sky was still as burning blue as at noon, the swirls of dust as white. Yet the mountains were beginning to look a shade less red, and to take on a gauze of purple. How terrible they were, those mountains, so barren, so heated-looking, and yet topped by snow!

And still Kate, even as she sat there looking at them with such dislike, unable to cry for the hot wind that scorched her smarting eyes, in all her discomfort, saw that the mountains were beautiful with a strange beauty that no familiarity would ever make seem quite real.

This was her nineteenth birthday, and she had never before been so unhappy. There had been a prolonged drought. For the last two years there had been scant rain in California, and so far this year there had been none. This condition brought anxiety to all. To Kate it meant a great disappointment. There would be no money for her to return to the university.

The State university was situated at Berkeley, just across the bay from San Francisco. It was a coeducational institution, and the sturdy daughter or daughters of many a struggling ranchman went to college with the son as a matter of course. California, at the extreme west, is as ardent an advocate of public education as the New England States, and the public schools are examined by the State university authorities, so that every young person,

ambitious to teach, feels that the gateway to the profession lies through the State university.

The first year, when Kate was a freshman, she had supported herself by being a waitress at a student boarding-house; but her strength had given out, and her father had refused to allow her to go back until he could afford to pay her board. So she had remained out this last year, and now she could not go back the coming year either.

"There never will be any money in this house," she murmured, bitterly. "There never was, and there never will be. Father's no manager."

The sun sank behind the mountains. The sky took on a deeper shade of blue, and the earth seemed cooler now that the glare was gone.

Sat Chung came around the side of the house with a small pitcher of water. When he saw Kate he paused, and looked abashed.

"What are you going to do with that water?" she demanded, imperiously.

Sat Chung maintained a guilty silence.

"You were going to water the roses," said she, nodding at him. "I know."

Still Sat Chung made no reply, but stared off at the red-purple mountains.

He, too, looked forlorn, thought Kate, frowning at him. Dust showed white on his blue-bloused figure and his long black queue. His unhappy yellow face was pitted by smallpox; his thin fingers clutched the pitcher. He knew that his beautiful roses were dying for lack of a few drops of water, and yet he dared not save them for fear of Missee Kate.

Sat Chung had worshipped her since she was born, after he had recovered from the first shock of disappointment that the baby had not proved to be a boy. When a baby, she began to tyrannise over him, and now she was beginning to be more and more like her mother. It was Kate's mother who years ago, when he had been impertinent to her, had seized him by the collar, and taken the broomstick to him. After that experience he had always been able to understand why it was that American men granted their wives so many privileges.

"I do believe you've been watering those roses right along, and that's why John digs there," cried Kate. "He's found out it's coolest there. I should

think you'd be ashamed of yourself, Chung, when we have to be so careful of every drop of water, and when you know father has gone to town to sell the cattle for what he can get before they die on our hands."

Sat Chung hung his head. Every evening, out of their scanty store, he had watered the roses and heliotrope secretly. This time he had supposed Missee Kate in the house with her mother. He turned to go back to the kitchen. His meek, woe-begone face sent a pang through Kate's heart. After all, poor old Chung did not have a very good time.

"Chung," she said, imperiously, "give me that pitcher."

He handed it to her timidly, vague memories of the broomstick rising in him. Missee Kate was very like her mother.

Kate snatched the pitcher and tossed the water on the roses. Then in sudden passion she flung the pitcher down on the ground.

"There, Chung, I hope you're satisfied now," she cried.

She watched him with her gray eyes sparkling, as he bent his stiff, patient back to pick up the fragments.

John was rolling ecstatically around on the patch of wet earth.

Kate covered her face with her hands, and cried as if her heart would break. She had been unhappy, and now she was ashamed of her ebullition of temper.

She wept until, for sheer lack of strength, she had to pause. At last she took away her hands and looked up.

The sun was now fairly set, but in the peculiar afterglow the mountains seemed more vivid and nearer than ever. The tops of the dry, rustling eucalyptus-trees caught the bright reflection.

She drew a long breath, her mouth still quivering, her gray eyes swollen. But the exhaustion from crying brought a certain relief.

Sat Chung stood with his back toward her. John was beside him, and they were both looking south.

Kate could see the old cat's face. He was licking his whiskers, and his green eyes shone bright, almost

as if he were going mad. And how strange Chung seemed, standing as motionless as if he were a statue! She was about to speak when she felt the air blow back the curls on her forehead. How soft it was, how cool!

She sprang to her feet with a cry.

"Mother! mother!" she called.

She ran into the house and through the hall into the kitchen.

Her mother sat in a rocking-chair by the window in the large, comfortable room. She looked up from her sewing.

"Well, dearie, is father coming?" she asked.

Kate stood in the doorway, her girlish figure outlined against the square of blue sky at the further end of the long hall. Her hair was blown about her face, as she stood there laughing.

"Don't you know, mother," she cried, joyously, "don't you feel it?"

Mrs. Whitney half rose. Then as the draught of air that tossed Kate's curls so wildly blew full in her own face, she paled, and sank back into the chair.

"If your father had only waited," she said; "I

wanted him to wait another day before selling the cattle."

Kate was dancing about the kitchen with excitement. "It's from the south! It's from the south! The wind has changed at last. Oh, mother, dearest, I told you some good luck would happen on my birthday."

They went out and sat down on the kitchen stoop, side by side, their hands clasped in each other's.

Soft and sweet, damp with a suggestion of rain, freighted with hope, the blessed south wind blew in their faces.

"It changed all in a minute, mother dear," Kate's eager voice went on; "the storm will be here before morning. I just felt God couldn't be so cruel on my birthday."

"How I wish your father had waited," sighed Mrs. Whitney.

Kate drew her hand away impatiently. How could her mother be so depressing when the rains were coming at last, after all their prayers? Why think about the cattle now? But as she glanced at the anxious face beside her, her mood softened, and

she slipped her slender fingers back into the aproned lap, and clasped her mother's hand again.

"Well," said Mrs. Whitney, comforted by the loving pressure, "we must remember it isn't as bad as it might be. Your father said he would sell only half the herd. We mustn't let him get discouraged, but cheer him up all we can."

"And then there are the crops all saved," put in Kate, cheerily. "Oh, look at Chung going across the fields there with his bucket. He knows he can water his roses now. And if there isn't old John trotting after him as spry as a kitten!"

They sat there some time longer before they went in to get supper. During harvesting time Chung did the cooking, but when only the family was there, he helped Colonel Whitney about the farm, and Mrs. Whitney and Kate prepared the meals.

What fun the two had this evening, as they bustled around and stirred the fire and set the table!

"Just to think that I can go back to college, after all," cried Kate, gleefully, as she lopped off some of the bread dough to make the raised biscuit. "I

believe I'll just whip an egg into this, and put in some currants and an extra bit of shortening."

While the biscuits were rising, she set the table with the turkey red supper-cloth. They never used the original dining-room, but kept it for a back parlour.

"I wish we had some flowers for the centre of the table," she said, regretfully. Then suddenly she began to take the dishes off again. "I'm going to put on the white table-cloth, because it's my birthday, and the rains are coming."

"I hope they're not coming in to supper with us," rejoined Mrs. Whitney, with the twinkle in her eyes that Kate loved to see. "I hate to see you put on that best table-cloth, dearie. It's the last mother's got."

"I want it," said Kate, with a wilful nod of her pretty head, as she dragged out the table. Usually they sat around the three sides, with the fourth side pushed up against the wall. "It seems cozier pulled out, and father will like it nearer the stove," she added, "for it's going to be a damp evening, I guess."

At this last remark they both laughed. It was so delightful to think of a damp evening. The phrase implied a delicious joke.

"We'll have sliced ham and tea and some preserves. Your father's fond of those yellow peaches," said Mrs. Whitney, as she stood at the door looking across the fields to the road. "I thought I saw him a minute ago, but it was a swirl of dust."

Kate took the key, and went out to the cellar. It was a dugout under the shed, and as she went down the few steps she thought how nice the shining glass jars of fruit looked. They were all neatly labelled in her own handwriting. A few, however, had the fruit itself drawn in pen and ink on the slip of white paper and pasted on.

"Such foolishness," Mrs. Whitney had said, a little annoyed, if amused. She was always afraid Kate had inherited an impractical streak from her father's family.

Kate reached up now for a golden-looking jar on which was an especially elaborate drawing of a twig weighted with three peaches.

“ I guess I’ll have to take up some piccalilli, too,” she said, aloud. “ I love it with cold ham.”

As she turned to go over to the big stone pickle jars, she saw a big cake carefully pushed back on the shelf. Chung had made her a birthday cake. He had never failed to do so, but this time she had forgotten the custom in her anxiety about the rain. There it was, soft and fresh, covered with pink icing, ornamented with an elaborate scroll work in the white frosting, and having “ Kat ” written on it in chocolate letters. For Chung knew English imperfectly, and never could remember to put the “ e ” on his little mistress’s name.

“ I’m never quite sure whether he means John or me by that,” thought Kate, smiling, “ for he always spells cat just the same, k-a-t.” And she felt a fresh pang of shame, as she thought of her anger with Chung in the afternoon and the broken pitcher. “ I’m never going to be mad with him again,” she promised herself. She wished she might eat a bit of the cake that very minute. She knew it had the peculiar Chinese flavour Chung always put

into a birthday cake, and which she was never quite sure that she liked.

It was after eight before Colonel Whitney came home. They saw he was depressed, and from that guessed he had sold the cattle. He was a tall man, but he walked with a slight limp. He had been injured when a soldier in the Civil War. There were crow's-feet about his kindly blue eyes, the deep wrinkles that come from living in a land of sunshine. He was barely middle-aged, but he looked older, and was quite gray.

The cheerful greetings of his wife and daughter, the cosy supper, the birthday cake and white tablecloth imparting such an appearance of festivity to the homely meal, all put fresh heart in him. He had brought a present home to Kate for her birthday, a gift his wife had suggested. It was an English-French dictionary, a very stout little book bound in black, which Kate had long desired. "It was the only one they had in Green Hollow," he said, "so I was lucky to get it. And this bottle of perfumery is from father, Katsy. I knew my girl would like something pretty."

“I declare, mother,” he added, passing up his cup and saucer for a second pouring of tea, “nothing rests me like a cup of your good tea when I’m fagged out. After all, Annie, it isn’t as if I had sold the whole herd, and I got a good price, considering, on the cattle I did let go. At least enough to start our girl off on her notions of higher education, I guess. She’s already telling us what we don’t know, eh, mother?” He rose to get his pipe, and pinched Kate’s cheek as he passed her chair.

Kate dimpled and blushed.

Colonel Whitney had never taken his daughter’s college education very seriously, but he gave way to his wife. He had an old-fashioned notion that girls learned enough staying at home with their mothers. It would have been different had Kate been a boy, he used to say. He limped over to the stove now and drew up his favourite chair, and, opening the oven door, rested his foot on the ledge to get the heat.

“I declare,” he remarked, with a sly wink, “if these damp evenings don’t always give me a twinge of rheumatism in this pesky leg.” He smiled indul-

gently at his daughter, who was untying the bit of thin white silk ribbon which tied securely the glass stopper of the bottle. He had paid four bits for it, which, in California parlance, meant fifty cents. The bottle had the picture of a white rose pasted on it and was very pretty. "Perhaps you'd have liked a ribbon better, Katsy," he ventured.

"No, indeed," she said, smiling.

Not until Chung had cleared off the table and was eating his own supper in the little laundry off the kitchen did she proceed to the ceremony of cutting the birthday cake.

Her mother must have the first piece, and then the second was carried to her father, and even old John was given a little bit.

Mrs. Whitney drew the lamp near her and resumed her sewing. It was a blue dimity dress for Kate, and was trimmed with narrow white lace and black velvet ribbon. Now and then, as she sewed, she paused to eat a bit of the slice her daughter had put on a plate beside her.

"Chung does make good cake," she said, smiling, "but how I should like it if he had only flavoured

it with good plain vanilla! I suppose it sounds silly, but I never feel quite Christian-like eating cake with this queer Chinese taste."

"I know it, mother," cried Kate, "you're like me. You just keep on eating and eating it, to find out if you really do like it. And the first thing you know the cake's all gone, and you can't tell whether you did like it or not."

"I shouldn't mind a bit having company this evening," Mrs. Whitney went on. "Thread this needle for mother, dearie. Where I used to live in Vermont State we were great people for neighbouring. The farms weren't so far apart."

"I stopped at Green Hollow," said the Colonel, "and I ran across old man Schluter. He said the rains would decide them to open the district school, and spoke as if you could have it, if you were set on it, Katsy."

"Thank him very much, but I don't want it," she answered, with a spirited toss of her curls. "I'm going back to college."

"I thought I heard a step," interposed Mrs. Whitney.

“Mother is that set on having company she’s going to imagine some,” joked Colonel Whitney.

“Well, I did,” insisted Mrs .Whitney, not shaken in her opinion by her husband’s and daughter’s laughter, “I certainly did.”

As she spoke the last word, there came a sturdy knocking on the half-open door.

CHAPTER II.

A Guest from the Far North

FOR a moment the three stared at one another in wonder.

"The idea of our keeping anybody waiting so," cried Kate, at last, running to the door and opening it. "I declare we ought to be ashamed of ourselves."

"Not a bit of it," rejoined a hearty voice, as she flung wide the door. "For all you know I might be a tramp, and I haven't noticed a dog around. Most ranches keep a dog."

The speaker stepped into the room, and stood, a strange, bold figure, staring genially about him.

John rose from his place by the stove and arched his back, his green eyes glaring, as he spit at the newcomer.

"Pretty pussy, pretty pussy," said the man. "I'd

like to wring your neck, you devil. I hate a cat. There's his master, I'll be bound," he added, as he caught sight of Chung's yellow face peering around the laundry door. "See a cat in this country and there's bound to be a China boy not far off. See a China boy, it follows there's a cat about. Only thing I got against them. I like them better than I do the Irish."

"I was clean forgetting my manners," said Colonel Whitney, rising and going forward to shake hands with the unexpected guest, "but I was quite taken back on seeing you. You see we had just been laughing at mother here, because she thought she heard a step, and then if there didn't come your knock right on top of it."

"I hope I didn't startle you, madam," said the stranger, bowing to both Mrs. Whitney and Kate. Then he turned again to the Colonel. "My name is Hitchcock. English name, English born. I take it you're a Yankee."

"Yes, sir," answered the Colonel, grinning, "pure Connecticut nutmeg. Take a chair, sir, take a chair."

"I will, thank you," answered Mr. Hitchcock. "I've been in the saddle all day, and I'm pretty well fagged. Could you take me in for the night? I suppose that China boy of yours can attend to my horse, can't he?"

Kate laughed. "Chung's afraid of a strange horse. I'll go."

"No, indeed," cried Mr. Hitchcock, rising hastily, "you just show me the barn."

"Now you just sit right still," said Colonel Whitney. "I guess I know what's due company. Katsy, you go bring the lantern."

Kate lighted the lantern, and went out with her father to the barn.

While the Colonel was gone for a bucket of water, she unbuckled the saddle, and slipped a halter around the horse's neck, and led him into an empty stall. Old Tom put his head over the side of his box and whinnied.

"There, Tom," cried Kate, "don't be jealous because he's so much better looking than you are. Father," she added, as the Colonel came back, "this

is a beautiful horse, and has had splendid care. And do look at that saddle. I bet it cost a lot."

"I'm always inclined to trust a man who takes good care of his beast," said her father. "The joke's on us, Katsy. Mother did hear a step. And there you and I were a-laughing so smart."

"Where did you leave Pietro?" asked Kate.

Pietro was a Mexican cowboy employed by her father to watch the cattle. Sometimes weeks went by without his appearing at the house, and then it was only for fresh provisions. He camped by himself on a far corner of the ranch, and cooked his own meals.

"I left him in Green Hollow," answered her father. "I paid him off, and I suppose he'll gamble it all away."

He limped cheerfully about, mixing the pail of yellow feed, and throwing straw down for the bed. Kate hung about, patting the horse's velvet nose, and looking into his beautiful eyes. Old Tom and the other horses knew there was a stranger among them, and moved about in their stalls and whinnied mildly.

When they went back to the house they found Mr. Hitchcock sitting at the table, and Mrs. Whitney and Chung preparing a supper for him. His hat was off, and Kate noticed that the skin on his hands and the lower part of his face, particularly, was very red, and looked sore, although this was concealed in part by a close-cropped auburn beard. In spite of the trouble with his skin, he reminded her of the professors at the university. He did not look like a rancher. About his forehead the skin was whiter, and his hair clustered back so heavily as to impart an appearance of massiveness to his distinguished head.

"I fear I'm putting your wife to a good deal of trouble," he remarked to the Colonel.

"Nothing she likes better," answered his host, resuming his accustomed seat by the stove. He liked to see his Annie when there was company, and the unwonted excitement brought the roses to her cheeks and the old sparkle to her blue eyes. "I declare," he said now to himself, "Kate will never be as good-looking as her mother. She takes too much

after my side of the family, and the Lord knows we were a set of rawbones, we Whitneys!"

Chung was fussing around Mrs. Whitney. "I git suppah, I git him," he kept repeating, and she suddenly realised how mortified he would be if she refused to let him do so.

"All right," she told him, and went back to her sewing.

Years ago Sat Chung had been a cook in the family of a bonanza king living on Nob Hill in San Francisco, and his long service on the ranch had never taken from him his earlier traditions. Company was as important an event to him as to the rest of the family. He hurried out now to his room above the barn, and there twisted up his queue, and put on a carefully laundered white apron which he kept for state occasions.

While he finished preparing the supper, the others sat and talked.

"Clear up anything in the Klondike?" inquired the Colonel.

For answer Mr. Hitchcock extended both his hands, and regarded them speculatively. "Yes," he

said, "that's where I got the scurvy. I tell you it was awful, awful. The wonder is any man gets out of there alive."

"I guessed right," said the Colonel, "I knew you must have got it up in the Klondike, either there or at sea, and I saw at once you weren't a sailor."

"I tell my husband he ought to be a detective," interposed Mrs. Whitney, smiling. "Thread this needle for me, Katie, dear."

"That's a pretty colour," said Mr. Hitchcock, "I like blue." He smiled kindly at Kate, as if he had divined she was to wear the dress. A look of pain suddenly crossed his face, and he ran his fingers through his thick hair with a troubled motion, and frowning. "It was awful," he repeated, "awful. I lost my best friend up there, an Englishman like myself. We used to stare out on that white snow while we ate our salt food and hard tack, until it's a wonder we had any eyes left in our heads. I used to think of Nebuchadnezzar, and prayed the Lord to turn me into a beast and let me feed in a green field. Did any of you ever think

how we couldn't get along without something green to look at? We've got to have it."

"We don't see much green out here," put in Mrs. Whitney, a shade of bitterness creeping into her voice.

"And yet," cried Mr. Hitchcock, raising his head, a sudden light in his eyes, "I could see it was beautiful, beautiful. If you could have seen how those fields of snow took on colour at sunset, rose and violet and gold, and the green and blue glaciers, like mountains of glass. Yet I paid the price for having seen it." The light died out of his face, and there was again that pained contraction of his brows which made his three listeners know he was thinking of the friend he lost. "I paid the price. And do you know," he continued, more soberly, "the funny part of it all was that I couldn't make up my mind that coloured snow and those glass mountains were real. I couldn't, somehow."

"I know what you mean," cried Kate, with an unaccustomed ring in her voice, which made her mother look up at her in mild wonder at her child's excitement. "Only this afternoon I was looking

at the mountains and the white dust, and thinking they couldn't be real, and yet I have never seen any other kind of mountains."

Their guest nodded, and fixed his bright sympathetic gaze on her face.

Mrs. Whitney's face had saddened. She was thinking that that red and purple mountain range and the white sand seemed only too real. It was the green Vermont hills of her girlhood that seemed a dream.

"There, Annie," said the Colonel, "we're going back some time, my dear." He thought afresh what a mistake he had made to sell the cattle at such a sacrifice only that morning. If he had only taken his wife's advice and waited! Now, all his profits for the last two years were lost. The air blowing in the open window was soft and damp. He thought how the southwest wind which came to that country like the blessing of God was blowing all too tardily for him. He felt growing upon him the superstition that luck was against him. How dim the stars looked in the square of sky seen through the door! Usually they sparkled in the hot sky as bright and

clear as he remembered them on winter nights at home.

“I should like to get a breath of snow-air once more,” he said, aloud. “Why, Annie, there’s your maple-sugar.”

“I got him,” put in Chung, excitedly. He was afraid he would be interfered with, and he wished to have the sole honour of preparing the stranger’s supper. He put the platter of fried ham and eggs on the table, and the tea and biscuits; then hastened to the pantry to dig out a saucer of the soft maple-sugar that had come only that week from Vermont.

However hard the times were, the Colonel never failed to send for the tin can of maple-sugar for his Annie. “We’re not so poor yet, but what I guess you can have maple-sugar on your flapjacks, mother,” he would say.

“You Yankees seem to set a great store by maple-sugar,” said Mr. Hitchcock, laughing. “It tastes like brown sugar to me. I can’t tell the difference.”

“Wait until you taste this,” said Mrs. Whitney. But her guest barely tasted the maple-sugar, and ate sparingly of the ham and eggs. He seemed to

enjoy the canned peaches, and, to Chung's delight, drank five cups of tea, as if each cup were but a swallow. Moreover, he drank it clear, without cream or sugar, in the Chinese fashion.

John stepped slyly toward the group, lashing his tail. He disliked the stranger, but an irresistible desire to sniff at him impelled him to draw near.

"Get out, you devil," said Mr. Hitchcock, giving him a push with his foot, but with such a genial smile they were none of them in the least offended. "I hate a cat. I once had my shoulder nearly clawed out by a mountain cat."

John went back to his corner, there to lie and watch the family guest through his baleful, half-closed green eyes.

Chung, clearing off the supper things, chuckled. He had the superstition that John was possessed by an evil spirit, and so he always tried to propitiate him. Yet now he rather relished the rebuff dealt out to the old cat.

Another hour passed. Chung and John went off to bed, but the rest still sat talking and talking. The Colonel brought out a bottle of thin California claret,

and smoked two of the stranger's excellent cigars, and Kate cut and passed her birthday cake once more.

Mrs. Whitney finished the last stitches on the blue dimity, and folded it, and laid it on top of her sewing-basket. No one thought of the time nor of bed.

Colonel Whitney was anxious to learn of his guest's adventures in the Klondike. He himself had been eager to join the gold-hunters, but the entreaties of his wife had kept him at home. But, sometimes, the Colonel felt that had it not been for his lame leg he would have gone, against her advice, in the hope of getting rich quickly.

"I tell you, sir," he said, "this going to the war unfits a man for ranch life. It gets into the blood and makes him restless, and then there's nothing contents him at such a time but talking over things with an old comrade. But I don't seem to have lighted on any G. A. R. men round about here. If it hadn't been for my wife and this lame leg, I'd have been at the Klondike myself."

"You can be thankful you didn't go," answered Mr. Hitchcock, grimly.

"How did you come to go?" asked Mrs. Whitney. "I don't suppose you are a married man, however. I always hold that a man with a family has no right to risk his life."

Mr. Hitchcock smiled at her. "That is right, madam," he said, "but I was a bachelor, and my life was my own to save or lose. My going came about carelessly enough. I had been doing too much, and was thinking of knocking off work anyway for awhile, when I had a letter from a friend of mine. He was an Englishman I had known for years. He had an orange-ranch down near San Diego, but he didn't have the lucky touch. That year the blue mould had spoiled his crop. So he wrote to see if I wouldn't go up to the Klondike with him. Well, the idea took me. I was ready for some new adventure, and I saw at once I would get splendid material for my work in a perfectly new field. I cared more for that and the adventure than for the gold. The voyage wasn't so bad. Every one was full of excitement and planning how

they would spend their fortunes. But when we finally reached Dawson City, I was for going back on the same ship, but my poor friend had the gold fever, and I couldn't get him to come away. He was crazy with it, like a man in a fever. Well, it was the beginning of the end with him. We made our fortunes, but his strength gave out all at once."

"Did he die?" asked Kate, almost in a whisper.

Mr. Hitchcock nodded, as if he could not trust himself to speak.

"Oh, Ephraim," cried Mrs. Whitney, her blue eyes wet with sudden tears, "how thankful I am you didn't go. What difference would all the gold in the world make?"

"Listen!" cried Kate, holding up her finger.

They heard the gentlest, the most welcome sound in all the world to them, the patter of a fine and steady rain.

"I didn't think it would be here until to-morrow morning, anyway," said the Colonel, limping across the floor so fast that he beat them all to the door.

Awhile they all stood silent, the wet mist in their

faces. Then Kate broke from the little group and danced out into the night.

“Kate, Kate,” called her mother, “come back, child.”

But Kate went dancing, flying around the house like a wild thing. And John, detesting the rain now that it had come, nevertheless went leaping after her. Age could not quench his fiery spirit.

What a wonderful mystery was the soft, dark night and the chill, soft rain! The clear, pitiless light of moon and bright stars was gone. Kate felt as if her body could scarce hold her spirit, and her thought leapt forth to meet the happy year. How she would study, how she would work for the scholarship the university offered! All she asked was a chance.

“Kate, Kate,” called her mother.

And Kate, always obedient to the anxious note in the loving voice, paused in her wild race and came back into the house. Her gingham gown was soaked with water, and her slim neck rose white from the drenched ruffle of her waist. Her yellow hair was wet, her cheeks pink, and she looked for

all the world as though her little head were some flower that had been refreshed by a shower.

The air, which had been so quiet since the sun set, was now filled with a rushing sound. The wind was rising steady and strong.

"I guess it's about time we all turned in," said the Colonel, and began to lock up for the night.

While Kate and her mother went up-stairs to make up the bed for Mr. Hitchcock in the spare room, the two men smoked their final pipes. The lamp had burned out, but Colonel Whitney took off the two front lids of the stove, and the still live coals sent forth a red glow that gave them sufficient light.

"Glad as I am for the rains, and I'm mighty thankful," he said, "I'm always a bit afraid they'll bring back my rheumatism, so I just get my leg good and warm at the oven before I tuck it in for the night. I tell you, sir, that was a terrible war we had." And having started on his favourite subject, it was with great reluctance that he rose, obedient to his Annie's voice, and showed Mr. Hitchcock to his room.

Kate was nearly undressed when Mrs. Whitney half-opened the door.

"Here is your blue dress all finished, daughter, for you to fold away."

Kate was sitting on the floor drawing off her stockings.

"Haven't we had fun to-night?" she asked.

"Yes, but now get right to bed," answered her mother, with a tired, loving smile, and closed the door.

Kate laid the gown out lovingly on the bed. How dainty it was with the narrow black velvet ribbon drawn through the beaded lace! She had visions of herself in it at class socials and college teas.

"I've half a mind to try it on," she murmured. She slipped her bare feet back into her shoes, undid her hair, which she had already braided for the night, and coiled it up in a high knot on her head.

Then she put on the dress, and holding the lamp in her hand that she might see better her fair reflection in the dim mirror of the old-fashioned bureau, she paraded back and forth, craning her neck to this side and that to procure a better view. At last she

took it off most reluctantly, and seated herself on the floor to arrange it in the lower bureau drawer with her other finery. The drawer was now quite full of the sweet and fragrant belongings of a girl. There was the fan her father had given her when she graduated from the high school. She spread it open and tried the effect against the blue dress; then wrapped it up again in the tissue-paper. There was the white graduating frock her mother's skilful fingers had remodelled and retouched with yellow bows. There were her slippers and new silk shirt-waist and best handkerchiefs and ribbons, all delicate with the rose sachets she had made herself from the dried leaves of Chung's carefully tended roses.

Smiling, happy as in a dream, she slowly closed the drawer and finished her undressing. But when she had at last blown out the lamp and lain down in her hard, narrow, immaculate little bed, she found she could not sleep. She kept thinking of all Mr. Hitchcock had said about the North, the snowy fields with the rose and violet lights, the glaciers like mountains of glass, blue and green. It reminded her

of a fairy story she had read long ago, in which a prince had to scale a glass mountain. She wished she might go up to the Klondike herself and see the marvellous beauty for herself. She tried to imagine a white world. At last she became so restless she could not stay in bed, but got up and went to the window and listened to the gentle sound of the rain and the deep murmur of the wind.

She was thirsty, and opened her door and crept softly down the stairs, her feet bare, so as to make no sound. There was still heat in the kitchen stove, and she stood by it, quite enjoying the warmth, as she drank a cup of water.

When she went up-stairs again she heard voices, and smiled to think that she was not the only wakeful one in the house. The voices came from her father's and mother's room, and she started toward the door to whisper some merry good-night word to them, when she was startled by a sound that almost made her heart stop beating. It was a man's sudden, discouraged, heartsick sob.

Awed and frightened, Kate stood motionless on the threshold of their room and listened.

CHAPTER III.

Kate's Sacrifice

THEN she heard her mother's voice. "Suppose you'd sold all the cattle, or any of us were sick. I always mind me of that, Ephraim. The Lord has given us good health. We mustn't let Kate know we've been blue, for the child is so tender-hearted she wouldn't get over it as quick as you and I, who have been through so much worse in our lives."

"That's just it," groaned poor Colonel Whitney. "I don't see how we can afford to let the little girl go up to the university in the fall, and I won't let her go and work her own way as she tried to. If she were a boy it would be different. It isn't for myself I mind. You know that, Annie. It's you and Kate. I declare I felt guilty when I bought myself some tobacco over in Green Hollow to-day, and yet it seems as if I couldn't get along nohow without it."

"Now, Ephraim," answered his wife, decidedly, "you know I'm perfectly content, except for a touch of homesickness now and then, but we mustn't disappoint that child. The rains are going to save the crops right in the nick of time, and we'll just pay the interest on the mortgage out of the cattle money, and use the rest to send the child to the university. It would break her heart. And we've got her clothes all ready. Why, I've put my eyes out sewing for her. I can't give up letting her go, Ephraim, for all the mortgages in the world." There was a quaver in Mrs. Whitney's brave voice.

Kate did not wait to hear more. She crept back into her room and shut the door softly. Then she flung herself down on the bed and smothered her sobs on the pillow. But her weeping, though violent, was short, and soon she sat up and gave a defiant little nod to the darkness.

"I guess it won't kill me if I do give up going for another year," she said, aloud, and rose and went over to the window, and stared out at the blackness of the dripping heavens, and heard the roar of the rain. It had come just one day too late.

If the southwest wind had come only one day earlier! Her room was on the east side of the house, so that the wind and rain drove by her, and she could stand close to the window and not get wet, save for the mist. She reached out and picked a spray of the heliotrope. She knew the blossoms were withered, but she thought the leaves smelled sweet with the promise of a bud. She could hear the swaying and the clash of the six tall eucalyptus-trees in front of the house. In the morning their leaves would be green again instead of white with dust.

“I wish the rain could get into my heart and wash all the dust and grit out,” she murmured, whimsically. “Oh, how ugly and cross and mad I feel at father for selling the cattle! Oh, deary me, deary me, I don’t feel as if I ever could laugh again as long as I live.” And then suddenly, she did laugh. “Anyway, Chung has saved his horrid old roses. I wish they could all turn into the cattle father sold. And what an awful temper I must be in to wish anything so beautiful as roses to turn into steers.”

She tried to put a cheerful face on the matter. It was a lesson she had learned from her mother.

"Katie, dear," Mrs. Whitney had said many and many a time, "get into the habit of thinking that everything is for the best if disappointments come after you have done all you could."

"For mother is plucky," thought Kate now, "pluckier in some ways than father, and I guess it's up to me now to be plucky, as the boys at the university say."

It was growing colder and damper, and like the little old woman in Mother Goose who had her petticoats cut all round about by the peddler, Kate began to shiver and to shake.

"I've had my petticoats cut off in fancy," she thought, creeping back into bed and drawing the covers warmly over her; "I almost wish I'd never planned to go to the university."

Her courage and hope soon conquered her regret, and she lay awake planning out the next year. She would take the country school at Green Hollow if she could get it. She figured out for how much she could board, and how much she could save. And

then, if things went well on the ranch, her mother could come up and make her a visit when she went back to the university the year later.

At last she fell asleep to the fast patter of the rain on the roof.

This continuous gentle sound was so unchanged when she wakened that it scarcely seemed she could have been asleep. But the room was light. The mountains were hidden in the mist. Every gutter had become a small river. And the eucalyptus-trees! How splendid they were with their bluish green leaves, the young leaves tinged with red! The withered flowers had been beaten off the rose-vines, and there were clusters and clusters of green buds, some showing a bit of white, or yellow, or ever so faint a red. How sly they had been, all those buds, to keep their heads covered with dust until the miracle of the rain came!

“Oh, won’t you be lovely when you bloom!” she cried, and put her own head out of the window, and shut her eyes to let the rain fall on her face. She felt like a bird taking its morning bath. The cool, sharp spray was delicious.

She hurried to dress, for she could hear Chung getting breakfast down-stairs.

"Hallo," said Chung, when she came down. He was frying a chicken which he had killed the night before. The table was set with the damask cloth, and in the centre was a vase holding some sprays of heliotrope faintly budded.

"I tell you you'll have to work hard, now, Chung," said Kate, trying to tease him. "Father will have to get in a lot of ranch hands when the crops are ripe."

"Heap work," assented Chung, cheerfully. In honour of the guest he had on his white apron, and looked unusually nice.

They found Mr. Hitchcock to be even a more entertaining person than he had proved himself the night before. The warmth from the kitchen stove was more than ever pleasant, the fried chicken and coffee and raised biscuit delicious. Mrs. Whitney was thankful to have company, not only for the diversion it afforded to Kate and herself, but because it took her husband's mind away for awhile from his business troubles.

As for Colonel Whitney himself, he was divided between his desire to talk about his own experiences in the war and his eagerness to learn more of the region of the Klondike.

All through the breakfast not one of them lost consciousness of the rain. Several times there would be a lull in the conversation, and then they would all laugh to find how they were listening to the driving of the storm.

"As if it were almost too good to be true," said Mrs. Whitney.

"I guess they'll open the school now over at Green Hollow," remarked Kate. "I hope I can get it."

Both her father and mother looked at her quickly in surprise.

She spread some apricot jam on a bit of bread, and her face was quite calm, but she couldn't have told afterward what kind of jam it was.

"I thought you'd set your heart on going to the university, daughter," said Mrs. Whitney.

Kate raised a pair of unconcerned gray eyes. No one knew how fast her heart was beating. "Well,

I was thinking it over," she answered, "and I came to the conclusion that about the most sensible thing I could do was to take that position if I could get it."

"I hope you're not thinking there's some reason you can't go back to the university, Katsy," said Colonel Whitney.

"Well, we won't argue it now," put in Mrs. Whitney. "I guess we don't have to make up our minds this minute." She was puzzled, and wanted to talk the matter over when alone with Kate.

Mr. Hitchcock nodded his massive head in approval. "That's a sensible girl," he said, "there's too much study these days. It's nothing but cram, cram, cram, and none of our young people are taught to learn anything from the earth and sky. I always get in a whack at universities and colleges. Teach them more of the arts, I say. I'd rather a daughter of mine could tell me the colour of the dust at sunset than to beat her teacher in mathematics."

Kate looked up quickly, and met their guest's bright, peculiar gaze. She knew what he meant. How often she had watched the clouds of reddened

dust at sunset enveloping a wagon or the dashing figure of some cowboy on his horse. Only the evening before, the sun-illuminated dust had glorified the homely figures of Chung and John, as they crossed the fields that Chung might bring back buckets of water from their then scanty store for his roses.

"I was a pretty good head at arithmetic myself when I taught school back East," remarked Mrs. Whitney. She did not agree with Mr. Hitchcock in his estimate of colleges.

"Annie could always beat me at figures," said the Colonel, smiling at his wife, and thinking again that Kate would never have her mother's looks.

"I guess we can afford to start a kitchen-garden, Kate," said her mother; "and, Ephraim, I reckon you can put up those shelves for me, and do quite a little puttering about the house while this wet spell is on."

"I thought this rain would give you an ambitious streak," commented the Colonel, with a wink at his guest; "you'll have to look up my tools, mother."

"No matter how poor people are in England they have a kitchen-garden, if they have a bit of a yard,"

said Mr. Hitchcock; "and here they're too easy-going."

"It's called the tin-can country, you know," answered his host. "Every man raises only his particular thing, and lives on canned goods. Why, lots of cattlemen never use anything but condensed milk."

"I call it pure shiftlessness," said Mrs. Whitney, positively.

"The sight of a tin can takes away my appetite," remarked Mr. Hitchcock. "Up in the Klondike I didn't get a thing that wasn't canned. I tell you though it was harder yet, when after awhile the canned things gave out. I paid fifty dollars for one can of tomatoes for my poor friend. Look at my hands. Scurvy's an awful thing."

Late in the morning he announced that he must go, and insisted upon going out to the barn himself and saddling his horse.

"This rain will last a week," he said, "so I might as well start now."

Kate packed a lunch for him, and wrapped it in a piece of oilskin so it would not get wet. "And

I hope you'll find a shed somewhere in which to stop and eat it," she added.

"Good-bye, good-bye," he said, shaking hands with them all around; "I shall never forget this visit with you. I know your kitchen-garden will be a success, Mrs. Whitney. Plant some gooseberry bushes for gooseberry tart. Nothing better with cold mutton." He had too much knowledge of the hospitality of the country to offer to pay for his lodging, but he pressed upon the Colonel all the cigars he had with him, and he slipped a gold piece of substantial value into the skinny yellow palm of Chung.

"I guess he cleared up a fortune in the Klondike," remarked the Colonel. "I wish to the Lord you'd let me go, Annie."

Kate stood at the front door and watched the horseman as he went down the road. Where did he come from? Where was he going? Her imagination invested him with romance. But soon the rain that shut out the mountains closed in upon him also, and he was lost to view. His words had touched her vaguely. They had appealed to her

secret foolish fancies. She had never heard any one else say that real mountains could seem unreal, that dust could be anything but white.

Such a wonderful rain as it was! For over a week it rained; then at sunset on the eighth day the gray sky parted, and oh, such a glory, such a glory!

"The mountains have come back," cried Kate, in ecstasy, as she and her mother stood together on the front porch.

There the long range stretched, peak on peak, redder and purpler than ever.

"It will rain again," said the Colonel, coming around from the side of the house; "the sun's drawing water."

And it did with fitful fierceness for the next ten days. It was the heaviest rainfall that had been known in the State for twenty years.

Pietro, the Mexican cowboy, was driven in by the rain, and roomed in the barn and took his meals with the family. He was a wiry, dark-skinned little fellow, with scarcely ever a word to say to them, although his white teeth would flash in an occasional smile. The Colonel had a Yankee prejudice against

the Mexican's dark skin, and he never quite trusted him, as he did Chung. The cattle were coralled, and there was a shed where they could get protection from the rain.

"I guess you'll be going back to college all right, Katsy," said her father, jubilant, as he thought of his crops. "I guess you didn't mean that about taking the district school."

"Yes, I did," she told him; "I want you to put that money on the mortgage, and I'd feel a great deal better if I earned the money myself. And then, too," she added, bravely, "you know I'm quite a little ahead for my age. Most girls don't get in as early as I did. Of course, if I don't get the school I will go up to the university, and manage somehow so as not to waste time. But I think the experience of teaching will be good for me."

She kept to her resolution. Mrs. Whitney, if anything, felt more keenly the disappointment than her daughter. Kate's resolution rebuked her, as if the child had more common sense than she herself, but after a little her own cheerful spirit conquered, and she found herself thinking happily of the coming

year, which was to afford her more opportunities of seeing her little girl, for Green Hollow was not far away. Kate's sturdy independence these days was a source of real strength to her mother.

A busy summer followed the spring rains, and the two, with the assistance of Chung, had all they could do to feed the ranch hands during the harvesting. In the first flush of her resolve, the sacrifice she contemplated seemed easy, but, as the weeks went by, Kate was often depressed, dumbly resentful of her fate; often she felt even wickedly resentful toward her parents for the sacrifice she, herself, had insisted upon making.

The summer was so monotonous that the stranger's visit when the rains came stood out on the horizon of the daily routine as an event of importance. She often wondered about him, and wished that she might hear him talk again. She thought of him when there appeared over the low foot-hills that veil of tender green which was the grass, and was almost as swift to go again as the apricot blossoms. A few weeks of the burning sun, and all was brown.

“Mother, dear,” she said, “do you remember how Mr. Hitchcock said there was no colour like green?”

The homesick tears came all unbidden to the eyes of the New England woman. “I hope you will see the Vermont hills sometime, Katie.”

Not once that summer did Kate open the lower bureau drawer which contained her simple girlish finery. She could not bear to look at the dainty things. When her courage was almost gone, she would take down her text-books and study hard. For she kept up her studies with as much conscientiousness as ever, although no longer fired by as eager an ambition. She recited to herself, and wrote English themes, and tried very hard to be her own critic. But she made much progress in her French by the aid of the English-French dictionary that was her birthday gift. So the summer wore away, and the August harvest was one of plenty. In the extreme southern part of California, flowers that had not been seen on the desert for twenty years bloomed, owing to the fruitful rains. Once during the summer they had another visitor. He was a botanist, and had come south to study the unusual

flora. He remained over night on the ranch, and proved himself to be a pleasant, if not as entertaining a guest as Mr. Hitchcock.

Kate sent in her application and credentials to the school board at Green Hollow, and was elected teacher for one year. School work was well paid in California, and she was to receive fifty dollars a month, as she would have full charge of the work, with no assistant.

The morning came at last when her father hitched up old Tom and his companion, Jerry, to drive her over to Green Hollow. The little hair trunk that had been part of her mother's wedding trousseau was snugly packed and placed in the back of the wagon. The wagon had a buggy top over the front seat, and was quite comfortable. The day was a typical California day, sunny and fresh, with a brilliant sky.

"Now, father, you and Kate eat all the lunch, and take time to do it justice," cried Mrs. Whitney, as she put it in the basket.

Just as they were about to start, Chung came hurrying around the house with a bunch of roses,

and a basket which had the cover strapped on. Inside, the imprisoned John gave an indignant meow.

"I don't want him, Chung," cried Kate, laughing, although she was almost in tears at leaving her mother.

"Yes, you tek," answered Chung, obstinately. "Him all samee as fliend."

And she hadn't the heart to hurt his feelings by refusing.

They took their time getting to Green Hollow, for there was no need of haste, as they had an unusually early start.

Once, Pietro, who somehow always seemed to know what was going on at the house, galloped madly by them, with a gleam of his white teeth, and shot down the road in a cloud of dust.

"He meant that for good-bye, I guess," said Kate, laughing. She liked Pietro.

"I know an old deserted house where we can lunch, Katsy," said the Colonel. "I remember passing it last spring, and it looked terrible forlorn. But it'll be better than sitting down on the road."

But the deserted house proved to be far from

desolate, for it was covered with roses, and there was a peach orchard.

“ Well, well,” said the Colonel, “ you’ve no idea how different it looked in the winter.”

They sat down on the rotting veranda, which was, however, so picturesque, and had their lunch and the cold coffee, and gathered a few late peaches. Over their heads was Kate’s favourite rose, the wild yellow sweet-briar, and in the front yard were bushes of white moss tea-roses.

“ Why, father,” cried Kate, “ don’t you think it’s strange that the people who lived here planted only two kinds of roses? ”

After lunch she went through the house. There was much rubbish, and her explorations unearthed an old gilt-framed oval mirror which she insisted on taking, much to the Colonel’s amusement, and in spite of his warning that the people who left it might have had fever.

It was four o’clock when they reached Green Hollow. It was set like a cup in the mountains, and took its name from the fact that often, when the surrounding country was brown, it was emerald,

fed as it was by mountain snow-streams. There was a grocery and butcher shop, a drug store, which further confined within its four walls the town post-office and the dry-goods department. A number of the houses were on the main street, and others dotted the mountain slopes on either side of this principal thoroughfare. The most pretentious building was a two-storied frame house with a wide veranda. This house was painted sky blue, and was known as the Louvre. Here miners and ranchmen and cowboys stayed when they came into town, and lounged about the bar or played cards in the parlour.

Colonel Whitney pointed out the schoolhouse to Kate, as they drove by. It was the first building at the beginning of the street as they entered. It was made of logs, and had a rough stone foundation. Near by was a space fenced in as a corral for those students who had to ride to school on their ponies. In front of the schoolhouse was one giant eucalyptus.

Two barefoot boys walking down the road drew aside to let them pass. Kate looked down into the blue eyes of the smaller of the two, and encountered a critical and unabashed stare.

When they were by she heard a shout, and turned involuntarily. The boy she had noticed made a funnel of his hands and shouted, derisively:

“Teacher, teacher!”

Kate turned her back, and stiffened her slim neck haughtily. She glanced at her father, but he had not noticed the incident, and was looking ahead into the town.

CHAPTER IV.

All Night at "Higgins's"

MRS. HIGGINS, the wife of one of the school-board committee, had sent word that she would take Kate to board. The grocer, Mr. Love, was an old acquaintance of the Colonel's, and he directed them to the house.

"It looks a little shabby, Katsy," said her father, as they approached it.

"Oh, no, it doesn't," she answered, bravely, "it looks real homelike. Don't tell mother it was different from what we thought."

The house was only a story high, and was a good bit up the mountain. The front yard, which was fenced in, sloped straight down toward the street. They tied the horses, and then opened the gate and went up to the house. Mrs. Higgins met them at the door, and any doubts Colonel Whitney

might have had regarding the welfare of his little girl was at once dispelled by the motherly face of their hostess. She was an enormously stout woman, dressed in a bright pink calico, and she put her arms around Kate and drew her into the house, giving her at the same time a hearty kiss.

"Sorry Higgins is out," she said. "Just drive those horses around to the back door, where the road winds up, and I'll help you h'ist the trunk in."

While the Colonel went to take the team around, she led Kate up the long yard and through the house to the back door, to meet him there.

"Land sakes, that ain't a cat you've got in the basket, is it?" she asked. "But bring it right in. Higgins is fond of cats. I'll just help you tote this trunk into the sitting-room for the present."

Colonel Whitney kissed his little girl good-bye, and hurried away to hide his emotion. It gave him a pang to see her left to shift for herself. Then, too, time had flown, and he must hurry if he would arrive home before midnight.

"Don't forget mother's errands," called Kate, as she waved him good-bye from the front door. She

watched him out of sight; then turned back into the house to take off her hat and jacket, and lay them on the lounge. It was such a wide lounge that she wondered if it were used for a bed, and if it were intended that she should sleep there. The cottage seemed so small.

Mrs. Higgins rocked placidly back and forth in front of her, and plied her with questions. It was soon time, however, for her to start supper, and so for awhile Kate was left alone.

She looked around her. There was not a paper or book which she could read.

The only picture was a coloured lithograph of the first railroad built in California. On the table was a blue plush photograph album and a glass lamp. The floor was covered by a rag carpet, but the walls were rough-plastered and bare.

“P'r'aps you'd like to come out into the kitchen and visit?” asked Mrs. Higgins, beaming in at her from the door.

“Yes, indeed,” answered Kate, eagerly, feeling that she would be homesick if left to herself.

The kitchen was a low and narrow shed, with

a porch running the length of it. It commanded a splendid view of the mountain that rose precipitously back of the house, and by throwing one's head way back one could see snow on the peak.

Mrs. Higgins moved leisurely about setting the table. Kate's eyes opened wide. For some unknown reason she had taken it for granted that there was to be no one in the family save Mr. and Mrs. Higgins and herself. She counted the plates. There were eight.

"Do you have other boarders?" she inquired.

"No, indeed," said her hostess; "we took you, seeing as you might be company for Cynthia. Higgins and she has gone off this afternoon. I told 'em you would be here, and to stay to home. But they said you weren't company, seeing as you was coming here to live right along."

"You haven't yet told me what board I am to pay," ventured Kate, after awhile. She was anxious to come to some business arrangement, and find out where her room was that she might unpack her trunk.

"Bless you, child," cried Mrs. Higgins, "we don't

want you to pay board. Higgins and I like young people, and, as he said, you'd be company for Cynthy." She stepped out on the porch, and blew a blast on a battered horn that hung beside the door.

"They'll be here time the hot bread is browned nice. My family's healthy, and turns up regular at meal-times. Come out here on the porch. Ain't the mountain pretty back here? I like to set here and rock and look up at it."

She put the potatoes on to fry, and made the coffee, and then seated herself to resume her placid conversation.

Kate sat on the edge of the porch, and realised that she felt wholly miserable. How could she insist upon being shown to her room when Mrs. Higgins evidently would not hear of being paid for her board? And she would never stay without paying. And who could those eight plates be for? Counting in the absent Mr. Higgins and Cynthy, there were four plates left. If there were four younger children where did they sleep?

From the sitting-room came a yell of mingled terror and delight, and in another moment John leapt

by Mrs. Higgins, past Kate's head, and vanished in the mountain undergrowth.

"Oh, what will Chung say?" cried Kate, and rushed after the old cat. But she called and called in vain. When at last she turned back, discouraged, she saw a couple of boys standing watching her. She recognised them as the two who had shouted after her down the road that afternoon.

"He'll come back," said the older of the two, with a grin. "Say, did you know it was us you passed this afternoon back there on the town road? I bet Aaron you was the new teacher."

"I suppose you are two of my scholars," she answered, with dignity, trying to hide her annoyance over the way they had treated poor John.

"Aaron's the smartest in his class for his age, and I'm the worst," continued he.

"Well, it's 'cause I work," retorted Aaron, with sturdy self-approval, "and Billy, he don't. I'll go hunt up your cat."

Kate sat down again on the stoop and watched the elder boy trailing lazily after the energetic Aaron. She felt she was not going to like

Aaron. Suddenly the two stopped and whispered together.

"They're up to some mischief, I'll be bound," commented Mrs. Higgins, rocking just within the kitchen door. "Them boys are as entertaining a pair of critters as I ever knew. Cynthy's got a sullen streak in her make-up, same as Higgins. Now what is it, you Billy?" as the boy came back giggling. His eyes met his mother's, and she too commenced to laugh in pure sympathy.

"What's the joke?" inquired Kate, as pleasantly as she could, but secretly irritated by this senseless fun.

"'Tain't no joke," answered Mrs. Higgins, easily, rising to stir down the coffee; "Billy's always just that comical."

"'Tain't no joke at all," repeated Billy, trying to look grave, "but Aaron he says he wants to know if you spell scissors with two s's or three."

"Three," said Kate, sharply, and then felt her cheeks grow scarlet, as Billy gave a shout of glee and yelled out "three" to Aaron. How could she have made such a slip? No one knew better than

she that the word was spelled with four s's. Her fingers twitched to box Billy's ears.

"Now you boys go 'long and stop teasing the new teacher. You'd better not let your father catch you at it," warned Mrs. Higgins. "Ain't they that comical, Miss Kate? I declare I couldn't tell myself whether it was spelled double s or double z. But, land sakes, what difference does it make? It don't make scissors anything but scissors."

Kate watched her prospective pupils disappear in the underbrush with feelings that very nearly approached dislike. She knew that if she lived to be a thousand years old she could never forget the humiliation of this moment. The colour on her cheeks burned bright, but she held her slim neck all the stiffer, and answered Mrs. Higgins's remarks as pleasantly as if nothing disagreeable had occurred.

Cynthy and her father came in just as the hot bread was being taken out of the oven. Mr. Higgins was a tall, bearded, rather rough-looking man. But Kate liked him at once. There was an honest, kindly look in his dark eyes that attracted her. He was foreman at a mine, and was home now for a few

days. He greeted Kate cordially, and then took the soap and towel from the kitchen and went to wash at the bench in the grape-arbour.

And as for Cynthia, Kate stared at her. She had never before seen any one as beautiful. Cynthia was as straight and symmetrical as a young redwood. Her eyes were like brown wells; her brown hair was knotted low in her neck. Her cheeks were soft and richly flushed, and her lips were crimson. She wore a faded gown of blue and white checked gingham, and her brown feet were bare. She shook hands gravely with the new teacher, but did not smile. The two boys came back after a vain search for John, and followed their father to the bench in the grape-arbour to wash their faces and hands and dusty feet before coming in.

“Miss Kate,” called Mrs. Higgins’s cheerful voice, “just take down that horn and blow another toot.”

So Kate blew the old battered horn a blast which brought home the two younger children, who were called Jenny and Bobby.

Bobby immediately climbed up into Kate’s lap,

but she put him down, not liking his small dusty feet on her black cloth skirt.

"I reckon you're not fond of children," said Cynthy, picking up Bobby to carry him into the house.

"I don't believe in spoiling them," answered Kate, decisively. She looked very dainty and precise in her neat low shoes, her black skirt, and well-starched white shirt-waist, with the strip of embroidery down the front. Her pretty yellow hair was gathered up on her head, and she wore a small turquoise ring on her hand. Altogether she was a great contrast to Cynthy.

She never forgot that first supper at Green Hollow. Her seat was opposite the open door. Outside the mountain rose like a wonderful living wall. Now and then she saw the flash of a bird and heard their continual twitter, and every once in awhile the jangle of a cow-bell. The supper was bountiful. There was a dish of cucumbers soaking in vinegar, the big plate of hot bread, delicious honey and butter, fried potatoes and ham, glasses of milk

for the younger children, and thick cups of weak coffee for the others.

Cynthy alone was silent. Her beautiful, grave face never changed expression, and Kate kept glancing toward her curiously, wondering what she could be thinking about. She would have been astonished could she have known that Cynthy was thinking of nothing in particular beyond her enjoyment of the hearty supper. Aaron regarded Kate from time to time with his unabashed and speculative stare, and this made her nervous. She had no doubt that he was cogitating up some dreadful word with which to tax her memory. But for some reason he did nothing to torment her. Afterward she learned that both the boys were afraid of their father. Mr. Higgins seemed quiet and reserved, but he expressed the hope that she would like Green Hollow, added that he'd attend to boys who cut up any capers, and urged her to eat more of the honey, which had been sent in by a friend. After supper he put on his hat, lighted his pipe, nodded pleasantly to Kate, and went off down to the Louvre.

The cleaning of the table and dishes devolved upon

the two girls. Cynthy washed in absolute silence, and Kate wiped in a silence as great, filled with deepening amazement at the situation in which she found herself.

When the dishes were put away they went to the well to fill the bucket with fresh water for the night. The moon was risen, and the chill of the California evening was already in the air. A bird piped up clear and relapsed into silence. Cynthy looked at Kate across the bucket of water they carried between them, and smiled. Her smile said more than many words. It was entirely friendly, and Kate knew that Cynthy liked her.

"I know where there are some young owls," said Cynthy. "I'll show you sometime, but don't tell Billy and Aaron."

They joined Mrs. Higgins in the sitting-room, which was lighted by an oil lamp too small and dim to work by. Cynthy undressed the two younger children, and put them to bed in the next room while Mrs. Higgins visited with Kate.

About nine-o'clock the two boys came home.

“Get off that lounge, Cynthy,” cried Billy; “we want to go to bed.”

So she took a seat on Kate's trunk, and Mrs. Higgins rose and spread her ample skirts. The two boys, thus protected from observation, undressed behind her with many titters, and were in bed with the covers drawn over them before Kate could recover from her embarrassment.

“Now, Miss Kate,” said Mrs. Higgins, taking her seat again, “go on with what you were telling about them girls at the university. I like to hear of young people's pranks. Why, if I wasn't so stout I declare if I wouldn't be acting younger than Cynthy. You're a regular Higgins, you are, Cynthy.”

“Pa says so, too,” answered Cynthy, with one of her rare smiles. She was braiding a basket out of sweet grass, and the faint yet penetrating odour was pleasant but oppressive to Kate. Cynthy had learned the art of basket-making from an old squaw.

“I'm making this here for you,” she said to Kate.

The boys were already sound asleep, in spite of the lamp-light and the close little room. Aaron lay on

his back, with a look of entire innocence on his young face.

"Horrid boy," thought Kate, stealing a look at him.

"I don't know but what we might as well turn in before Pa comes home, girls," suggested Mrs. Higgins, as it neared ten o'clock. "Have a bite of cake, Miss Kate. I always keep it in that tin box on the upper shelf in the cupboard, out of the reach of the young ones, or it'd be gone fast as I made it."

"No, thank you," answered Kate, feeling as if a mouthful of food would choke her, "I guess I'll just step out into the kitchen and get a cup of water."

The moon was shining into the open doorway. She stepped outside. How calm and beautiful it was, but oh, so lonely. She heard the cry of an owl, and it made her more homesick than ever; it was so solemn.

She called John several times, but to no avail. Poor Chung would take it hard if his pet were lost.

"I just shoved your trunk under the lounge," said Mrs. Higgins, when she returned; "I thought

you wouldn't want to unpack it to-night, seeing as you can sleep in something of Cynthy's."

Could this really be her very own self, Kate wondered, as she lay in bed an hour later beside the calmly sleeping Cynthy? Instead of one of her own pretty nightgowns she had on a wrapper of Cynthy's. Bobby and Jenny were sleeping quietly in a trundle-bed at the foot of that in which were the two girls.

She heard Mr. Higgins come in and undress in the dark in the same room, talking the while to his wife of a shooting-affray which had taken place at the Louvre that evening between two drunken cow-boys. Kate put her hands over her ears, feeling like an eavesdropper. After awhile she took her hands away again. The talking had stopped. She lay wide awake, nervous as a cat, trying to distinguish the different breathing of each of the five persons in the room with her. Oh, if she only dared slip out and go to sleep on the wash-bench in the grape-arbour. She envied John. He at least had his liberty.

At last she fell asleep. When she awoke the sun

was shining brightly into the room. She sat up and saw to her relief that she was alone. Cynthia was gone from her side; the trundle-bed and the big bed were both empty.

Kate rubbed her sleepy eyes and laughed. The good long rest had restored her spirits and keen sense of humour.

"If I could only see mother this very day to tell her all about it," she thought.

Her trunk had been put inside the room. On top of it was the mirror and John's empty basket.

"Thank goodness," she said aloud, slipping out of bed, "that I didn't unpack last night. Now, I can get away so much quicker." She wondered at her own good spirits, and reflected that it must be the mountain air. She did not hear any one moving about the house as she dressed, and she guessed rightly that the family had all gone out.

She found the coffee-pot set back on the stove where it could be kept warm without boiling. Her breakfast was on a plate in the oven. But first of all she went out and washed in the clear fresh water that was in a pail on the bench in the grape-arbour.

It was a wonderful morning, and she felt like singing and dancing. Now she could understand her mother's longing for the Vermont hills, as she herself looked up into the redwood forest that covered the mountain. And yet her memory clung loyally to the lonely, barren red and purple range she had known since a child. After she had eaten her breakfast she put on her hat and jacket to go out to look for a satisfactory boarding-place.

She reached the front gate and was about to open it, when to her dismay she saw the flutter of a pink calico skirt down the road. She had hoped to make her arrangements first, before speaking to Mrs. Higgins. Then when her plans were once made, it would be difficult to alter them.

"Going for a constitutional?" called Mrs. Higgins, cheerfully. She carried a market-basket on her arm. "I calculated to be home long ago, but Love, the grocer, is such a gossip I couldn't get away before. Found your breakfast in the oven?"

Kate had grown a little pale. She felt her position to be a delicate one. "Mrs. Higgins," she said, locking her hands nervously together in front of



““GOING FOR A CONSTITUTIONAL?’ CALLED MRS.
HIGGINS, CHEERFULLY”

her, "thank you for your kindness very, very much indeed, but I guess I can't stay."

"Can't stay," echoed Mrs. Higgins, leaning on the gate after she had opened it, "can't stay?" Then in a second her puzzled expression cleared. She put her basket on the ground, and extended her motherly arms. "You poor lamb," she cried, "you're homesick for your ma, ain't you? Come right here."

But Kate stood still, quite pale with the intensity of her emotion. Her mother had never petted her; she wasn't used to being cuddled, and now she was embarrassed. "It isn't that; but I think you're too crowded for me, and I think I should like a room of my own. You see, I've always been accustomed to having my own room."

CHAPTER V.

“ ROSE MAY SMITH — MILLINER ”

THE shrewd good-natured eyes of Mrs. Higgins watched her a moment. “ I reckon you’re an only child, ain’t you, Miss Kate? ” she said, slowly. “ An only child is always kind o’ selfish. They don’t want to share and be shared with. Ain’t that it? ”

“ I guess it is,” answered Kate, not knowing why it was she had a sudden sense of shame.

“ Well, go along and take your constitutional,” added Mrs. Higgins, “ and think it over. I ain’t one to hold a person against their will.”

Half-way down the road Kate looked back. Mrs. Higgins was leaning on the gate, smiling.

“ What is it? ” called Kate, timidly.

“ You’re just that comical, Miss Kate,” Mrs. Higgins’s pleasant voice floated down, “ so spunky-like.”

And Kate continued the descent with the con-

sciousness of being watched all the way by that pink-clad, smiling figure. “I know one thing,” she said to herself, almost ready to cry, “I never could feel comfortable living with Mrs. Higgins.”

The main street looked busy and attractive, as she turned into it. Mr. Love, the grocer, raised his hat to her, and she gave him a stiff little bow. It was not until after she passed that she reflected she might have asked his advice in regard to a boarding-place. But she did not turn back. She wanted to explore for herself.

A tiny cottage she was passing attracted her attention. She stopped in front of it and laughed. It was so cunning, nestled among the flowers. A hedge of pink ivy geranium separated its wee front yard from the street. A flower-bordered path, so narrow that two people could not walk abreast in it, led up to the door, on which was a sign bearing the name, Rose May Smith, and below the name the word, Milliner. Lace curtains were drawn back at the front window in order to show a number of trimmed hats in a glass case. Several bunches of artificial violets were pinned on the curtains.

It was so funny to think of a milliner-shop in Green Hollow that Kate forgot her own errand as she walked on and tried to figure out if such an establishment would pay, and who could be Miss Rose May Smith's customers. She walked on until she reached the schoolhouse, the last building on the street. She had sought it instinctively as her one refuge. But now she stood in front of it, and realised that it was the last place for her to try to get board. "Unless I sleep on a bench and board myself," she said, with a laugh, "I must be going daft." She turned to go back to consult Mr. Love, the grocer. He might know some one who would take her.

As she passed the Louvre again she glanced across, and saw a man sitting on the broad sky-blue veranda. He was smoking a pipe, his feet were on the railing, and his slouch gray hat was pulled well down over his eyes. What could there be familiar about him that he should arrest her attention? And yet Kate walked slower and slower, hesitating; then all at once she turned and crossed the street to the Louvre, and stood on the sidewalk in front.

“Why, Mr. Hitchcock,” she cried, “do you live in Green Hollow now?”

The man addressed stared a moment, then came quickly down to shake hands with her. “Well, well,” he said, with the genial smile she remembered, “so you’re here, too. Are your father and mother with you? Come over to visit friends, I suppose.”

“No,” she answered, “I’m the new school-teacher, and, oh, Mr. Hitchcock, do you suppose you could help me out? I want to find a boarding-house, and I don’t know where to look.”

“We’ll find the place if it’s in this town, and if not we’ll have to make it,” he said, with hearty sympathy. “Now just a minute. Turn square around. Look up there. Isn’t that a picture for you?”

Above the opposite side of the street the cattle were climbing up the mountainside, and the blue sky gleamed through the trunks of the redwoods at the ridge. How fresh, how cool, how lofty it looked! Kate felt that the boarding-place did not matter very much for the moment, and she was ashamed of the anxiety which had made her blind to the splendid

landscape about her. She looked at her companion with some timidity. He seemed strange to her and unlike most men, in calling attention to the view when there was any practical matter to be attended to. She felt that he had for the moment forgotten her presence. There was a remote look in his lifted eyes and an expression of wistfulness on his face which she felt that she understood in some vague way she could not have explained to herself.

He sighed and took off his hat, and ran his hand through his heavy hair with the troubled gesture she remembered.

“A year lost,” he said. His expression changed suddenly as he noticed that she was watching him, and he smiled. “Well, Miss Kate,” he said, “you see I remember your name quite as well as you did mine, which is very polite of us both, don’t you think so?” He laughed, so that she joined in. “And now,” he continued, “you want a boarding-place. Where shall we go first? Let me see. Why, of course, we’ll ask Rose May.” He raised his voice and called, “Rose May, Rose May.”

While they had been standing there, Kate was

conscious of a girl's voice singing some simple song in the Louvre. And when Rose May appeared, she knew at once that the voice must have been hers. She came out carrying a dustpan and broom and wearing a large apron.

“Rose May,” asked Mr. Hitchcock, “don't you know a good boarding-place for this young lady?”

The girl shook her head.

Mr. Hitchcock was disappointed. “I thought surely you could help me out. I'm afraid we'll have to try the Widow Parks on the street back, but it's scarcely the place for a girl. She's a good respectable woman, but a number of ranch hands take their meals with her. Still, we might go and ask her.”

They walked on, Mr. Hitchcock calling her attention as they went to the curve of the street. “Make much of your first impressions in a new place,” he said; “you never forget them no matter what comes after. A new place is always an event of great importance to me. I love to enter a strange city for the first time, don't you?”

“I don't know,” she answered; “I've never been

anywhere, except to the high school in Stockton and up to the university."

"But you've seen San Francisco," he said, "the city I love best."

Kate made no reply. His words sent an unhappy pang through her heart. Here she was in Green Hollow, and she had hoped to be in Berkeley, just across the bay from San Francisco at this time. They walked on in silence for some moments. Kate was puzzled by her companion. His appearance had improved since she saw him at the time of the rains. The scurvy on his hands and face was gone. He wore breeches and jacket of brown corduroy and high riding-boots. She remembered his horse, and asked after it.

"Holly is as pretty as ever," he said. "Oh, yes, I have her here with me in the stable at the Louvre. I named her Holly because I happened to buy her one Christmas." And he laughed heartily.

"I often tell father," said Kate, "that he gives our live stock fancy names just the way I used to call my dolls."

They turned the corner, and he pointed out the house to which they were going.

“I don’t like it,” cried Kate, drawing back, “look at the chickens running about the front yard. It looks so shiftless.” She was ready to cry.

There were light, quick steps behind them, and, turning, they saw Rose May running after them. She came up fluttering and breathless, shading her eyes with her hand.

“I want to say she can board with me,” she said, addressing Mr. Hitchcock, “and she can have the parlour, if she don’t mind the hats in the window. I couldn’t very well take them out as they’re my business.”

Mr. Hitchcock looked from one girl to the other.

Kate recalled the tiny cottage, and she had liked Rose May the minute she saw her.

“I’ll come,” she said; “who else is there?”

“Just me,” smiled Rose May.

“Why, we can have coöperative housekeeping,” cried Kate, “the way the girls do up at the university.” Coöperative housekeeping was one of Kate’s young dreams.

Rose May dimpled and smiled. Kate's voice implied something pleasant, although she didn't quite understand.

Cynthy came from around the corner. She had Bobby and Jenny with her. The three had been out in the woods and had their arms full of wilting wild flowers. To Kate's dismay the three paused.

"Hullo, Cynthy," cried Mr. Hitchcock, "this young lady is your new teacher."

"I reckon I know it," said Cynthy; "she boards with we'uns."

Kate felt her face crimson as she met Mr. Hitchcock's look of surprise. "I came last night," she explained, "and father took me to Mrs. Higgins's, but she didn't have a room for me, so I had to go somewhere else."

"Ain't you coming back?" said Cynthy.

Kate shook her head, feeling very unhappy, and as if she were in the wrong, when she knew she wasn't.

"I'll tell ma if you want me to," said Cynthy,

and went on with Bobby and Jenny. Kate knew that she was deeply hurt.

“Mrs. Higgins is a good friend of mine,” remarked Mr. Hitchcock; “there isn’t a thing she wouldn’t do for you, but I guess you two girls will be happiest by yourselves. How soon is this new arrangement to commence?”

“Right away,” said Rose May; “I have my sweeping all done, and I’ll just skip work for half an hour, and do the dusting later.”

The three walked back to the cottage, Mr. Hitchcock chatting pleasantly, Rose May carrying her dustpan and broom, and Kate without a word to say.

Mr. Hitchcock left them at the gate. “Now, young ladies, let me know if I can be of any assistance.”

“Yes, sir,” answered Rose May, unlocking the door, “we will.”

When they were inside and the door was shut, Kate did not even look around the little parlour. Instead she dropped into the nearest chair and began to cry.

"Oh, what is it?" cried Rose May, in dismay.

"I'm so mortified," cried Kate, "so hu-hu-humiliated. I could see Mr. Hitchcock thought I was horrid to leave Mrs. Higgins, and Cynthia's feelings were hurt. I know it. But I couldn't sleep and dress in the same room with five other people, and those horrid boys in the next room. Could you?"

"Of course I couldn't," cried Rose May, all sympathy, "don't you mind." She put down her pan and broom, and kissed Kate.

And from that kiss came the lifelong friendship that was to exist between the two girls.

The cottage consisted of three rooms and an outside shed. This shed Rose May used as a dining-room in summer, and a storeroom when the colder weather came. She took her guest out to see it. There was a tiny table and one chair.

"We'll have to get another chair to match," said she, "and see here in this cupboard I keep my dishes. I always have real pretty dishes; this pink cup is for coffee, and this buff is my tea-cup. You can have your choice."

There was no glass in the shed window, nor was there any door, but this made it all the pleasanter. “It was like eating out-of-doors,” Rose May explained. In the back yard were two lovely pepper-trees with their fern-like foliage and pinkish berries.

“Don’t you ever get lonely?” asked Kate.

Then it was Rose May’s turn to cry. Her blue eyes welled over with tears, and her mouth quivered.

“But now,” she said, smiling, “it’s going to be lovely with you.”

There was a knock at the front door, and they hurried to answer it. Mr. Love was there, with a big basket of the fruit and other delicacies his store afforded.

“Mr. Hitchcock says with his compliments for your housekeeping,” he announced; “where’ll I take ’em?”

“Right out in the kitchen, please,” said Rose May.

“Say,” said Mr. Love, when he had thus emptied his basket, “say, I thought you was to board at the Higgins’s. She told me so herself this morning.”

Rose May gave Kate a significant nudge. Mr. Love was the gossip of the town.

"I just stayed there over night," said Kate.

"Found Mrs. Higgins too easy-going, hey?" he asked, with a wink. "Do tell, what was the real reason you didn't stay? Higgins is an ugly fellow. I hear tell he whips them two boys of his awful. I calculate I never laid a hand on my Jim since he grew up. It takes the spirit out of a boy to lick 'im."

"Jim's an awful lot bigger than you," said Rose May, and clapped her hand over her mouth with a giggle, knowing she had said something she shouldn't.

"Well, Jim he ain't never been stunted in his growth by lickings," retorted Mr. Love, shifting his basket under his arm. "I must be going. You'll find them ripe olives good."

Rose May could stay no longer, but must hurry back to do her dusting at the Louvre.

"I work there mornings," she explained, "helping out Mrs. Bennett. It's her husband keeps the Louvre. I sweep and dust and take care of the beds and stay to wait on the table and help with the

dishes. I get real good pay, and have all my afternoons and evenings to myself.”

Just after she had started back and Kate was alone in the house, there was another knock on the front door. She looked out of the window, and saw a wagon in front of the house with Aaron and a man she didn't know on the seat, and her trunk and basket in the back.

She opened the door and found Billy. “Ma says as you might like your things. Shall we bring 'em right in?”

“Yes, if you please,” said Kate; “I am very much obliged.” She was too embarrassed to say much, and stood aside to let them carry in the trunk and basket and the old mirror, which she had forgotten having.

“How much is it?” she asked the teamster, timidly.

“It ain't nothing,” said Aaron; “he's a friend of ma's. That's why she yelled to him when she seen him going by. She says there ain't no use paying for a thing when a friend'd just as soon do it as not.”

That afternoon Kate mustered up her courage to

go to call on Mrs. Higgins and thank her for sending down the trunk. She also wished to ask if anything had been seen of John.

She found Cynthy on the back porch looking over a big washpan of greens. Mrs. Higgins was rocking just within the doorway.

"Well, Miss Kate," she said, pleasantly, "I kind of expected you."

Kate sat down on the stoop beside Cynthy. "I want to thank you for sending down my trunk," she said, her face flushed with embarrassment.

"Oh, that's all right," said Mrs. Higgins; "do tell now about your finding out Rose May. I declare, Cynthy, if your ma ain't getting to be as inquisitive as Love."

"He was over," said Kate, laughing.

"I might have knowed it," said Mrs. Higgins; "what'd he come for?"

So Kate told her about Mr. Love, and then from that went on to tell all about seeing Mr. Hitchcock and meeting Rose May. To her surprise she found that her nervousness and embarrassment had gone, and that she could talk quite freely. She saw that

Mrs. Higgins was not inclined to be resentful nor to take her guest to task in any way. There was something very large and tolerant in her nature, and from that afternoon Kate always loved her.

Mrs. Higgins was interested in hearing about her acquaintance with Mr. Hitchcock.

“He must have come direct from your ranch to Green Hollow,” she commented. “We was all naturally curious about him. Then Love (that long nose of his always finds out everything), he learned the stranger almost got snow-blind up in the Klondike, and the doctor said as he wasn’t to work for a year, but just rest his eyes, and so he come here.”

“What do you suppose his work is?” asked Kate, eagerly.

“Well, I don’t know,” said Mrs. Higgins, “I don’t know. He’s something out of the ordinary, I’ll be bound. Sometimes, I ’low he’s what they calls a professional man, a lawyer or doctor-like, but Love he says no, ’tain’t that. It’s more likely he’s a book-writer or one of them actor-fellows. Love is awful knowing.”

“I think he must be a writer,” said Kate, jumping

to the conclusion that pleased her. She remembered how quick he had been to see beauty about him. "Why, Mrs. Higgins," she cried, her eyes bright with delight, "he's a poet, of course!"

"I 'low you're right," answered Mrs. Higgins, admiring Kate's shrewdness.

She urged Kate to stay to supper, but Rose May would expect her and she must go. Nothing had been seen of John, and this made her feel blue, not only for the sake of the old cat, but because of Chung's grief when he should learn his friend was lost.

Cynthy had not said much during the afternoon, but she walked down to the gate with Kate and picked her some roses. Kate recalled the girl's rare smile as they were carrying the bucket from the well the night before, and she wished that Cynthy would look at her so again.

But Cynthy's beautiful face never lost its habitual gravity this afternoon, and Kate knew instinctively that she, alone of all the Higginses, was deeply hurt. As she walked home she appreciated for the first

time to the full the hospitality that had been shown her.

That evening and the following day, which was Saturday, were full of busy planning and doing for the two girls. Sunday they went to the one church in Green Hollow. During the week it was the public hall, and on Sundays the different denominations took their turn at special services. This hall was in the block above the grocery and the post-office, and had a small organ. Kate found out that every one went to church, and Rose May had a class in Sunday school.

School opened Monday, and the day found Kate nervous and anxious to begin her new duties, and have the hard work of forming the various grades of a district school over with. She went very early, long before it was time, and was thankful, indeed, that she had done so, when she unlocked the door and discovered the litter the birds and squirrels had made just over Sunday, for only Saturday she and Rose May had swept and dusted the room. Some boys had been in and scrawled on the blackboard and turned her table upside down, and set the bottle

of ink on the ledge above the door. Fortunately the desks were nailed to the floor and could not be moved.

Kate locked the door and dragged the table to it. Then she set the chair on top, and so climbed up and got the bottle of ink. It was not long before she had the room once more in order, and, as a final touch, placed the flowers she had brought from Rose May's garden in a cracked tumbler of water. She was conscious that for nearly half an hour the children were about. The door was partly opened, and then shut to with a giggle. Faces peered in at the window and vanished, but she sat at the desk writing, and did not look up. At one minute of nine she rang the bell, and her pupils came slowly in by ones and twos, giving her either bashful or resentful glances.

There were twenty-five in all. The five in the senior class she judged to be near her own age, if not more in the case of one large, serious girl whose name was Mary Johnson, and who had ridden over on her pony. The others ranged down to several little a-b-c tots, and she saw that the five Higgins

children were there. That first morning seemed unending. At half-past ten the younger children had recess for five minutes, and at twelve school was dismissed until two o'clock. It lasted only a little while in the afternoon, for the first day was necessarily the starting-in time, for the planning of classes and discussion of text-books, but Kate was quite as tired out as if she had taught all day.

CHAPTER VI.

Kate Proves Herself a Disciplinarian

A MONTH had passed since that first day. School was over for the day, and Kate sat alone at her desk, correcting the spelling-exercise papers. Two of the younger children had been told to stay because they had been naughty. Mary Johnson, who came on her pony faithfully every day, remained to write her lesson in English for the next morning. She lived on a ranch where there was too much work to be done for her to take time to study at home.

At the blackboard a tall, lanky boy stood writing the word scissors. He had already written it twenty-five times when Kate spoke.

“Rub it all out and begin over again, John. You spelled it wrong just then.”

The boy looked as if he couldn't believe her, and ran his eye down the column until his attention was

caught by the twenty-first word. He had omitted the "c." He hesitated.

"Guess I'll just rub out the last four," he suggested.

"Rub it all out and commence over again," said Kate, in a tone that made the two guilty youngsters quake, for fear it would be their turn next to receive a reproof.

Mary Johnson glanced up and smiled, then continued her conscientious plodding.

The afternoon had been a distressing one. From the first Kate had had to suffer not a little from Aaron's joke about the scissors. With one or two exceptions every boy in the class had asked sooner or later how she spelled the word. She had directed each questioner to the big dictionary on the window shelf with a calmness of demeanour she was far from feeling. Several times she found old scissors on her desk, and once Bobby Higgins, who was too young to be at school any way, came proudly up to show her a pair of rusty, broken scissors hanging by a string around his neck. She only smiled at the

innocent little fellow, but she felt her anger rise toward her tormentors.

This afternoon it had been John Bennett who had inquired the spelling of the word, and she had directed him as usual to the dictionary. As he crossed clumsily over, a foolish grin on his face the while, a general titter went around the room. Kate had an inspiration.

“I think the best way for you to remember how to spell that word, John,” she had said, pleasantly, “is for you to write it one hundred times on the blackboard, and the second boy who asks can write it two hundred times, and the third boy three hundred, and so on.”

The task seemed simple enough at first to John. But soon he began to get confused and write the word wrong in his haste to get through. A titter from some watchful mate would apprise him of his mistake, and he would be obliged to rub it out and begin over again.

School was dismissed, and still John, angry, confused, conscious of the relentless pair of gray eyes

that surveyed his work coldly from time to time, toiled on.

Now he turned around sullenly. "Chalk's all gone," he announced.

Kate lifted the cover of her desk, and silently extended a new crayon to him.

An hour passed, at the end of which Mary Johnson put away her writing, said good night, and went out to swing herself into her saddle and ride home, and the two youthful culprits were sternly bidden to put away their spelling-books and to depart.

John could hear his friends whistling outside, and knew they were making contemptuous remarks at his cowardice in staying. He foresaw he would have to whip every one to prove his valour. He did not dare to disobey the teacher, for he knew she would not hesitate to report the matter to his parents. He began to work doggedly now, and slowly.

Kate put aside the corrected spelling-papers, and taking a pencil began to draw the eucalyptus-tree as she saw its trunk and lower branches through the open door. It reminded her of the six eucalyptus-trees at home. How they had bowed and bent in

those spring rains! In imagination she could see them plainly; the first twisted back, as if loath to be driven from its fellows, the third and fourth pressing together, seeming to push the second tree, all their tops mingled and white in the mist, the last two with broken branches. Her own mood was wild and wayward, and she took pleasure in trying to sketch the trees as she remembered them. The first month of her teaching had passed, and left her disheartened. She found the discipline more difficult to maintain than she had even dreamed of, and the close of the day invariably left her tired out. She had more trouble with the younger boys than with the older ones. These last had made the life of the former teacher, a young man, miserable; but chivalry, uncouth though they were, kept them from tormenting the slender and resolute girl whose courage apparently never faltered.

But it was not the discipline nor the actual work which troubled Kate. It was the secret admission to her own soul that she didn't like teaching. That was the appalling fact. It was her last thought at night; it woke with her in the morning. She felt

that her nature must be inherently wicked not to like what should be her pleasure and duty in the future. She almost shuddered at herself. But the fact remained. She did not like to teach, and she knew now that she never would like it better.

"Not if I taught a hundred years," Kate told herself mentally, in passionate revolt.

She pushed away the sketch and stared out-of-doors. There was nothing for her to do but to teach. Yet how hollow now seemed her ambition to prepare herself for it at the university! There was Rose May. She was happy because she loved her millinery. She was happy as her pretty name when it came to trimming hats. She enjoyed her work at the Louvre because she had something to look forward to, in the building up of a profession she loved. She had insisted upon retrimming her friend's hat. Kate looked at it now, as it hung in the open closet, a new black velvet bow on top and some violets under the brim.

A prolonged sigh broke in upon her meditations, and she smiled as Johnny Bennett shifted wearily from one foot to the other.

"What is it, John?" she asked.

"Nothin'," he answered, sombrely, "I'm about wore out. I tell you I'm no longer sure how to spell this here old word, dog-gone it."

"S-c-i-s-s-o-r-s," spelled Kate, briskly, a sparkle of mischief in her eyes, "you've only ten more times now to write it, if you don't make a mistake again."

She went around and closed and locked the windows for the night, against marauding squirrels, picked up the scraps of paper, dusted her desk, and flung away the wilted flowers that the children had brought her. She saw Cynthia Higgins waiting outside to walk home with her.

"Come in, Cynthia," she called.

Cynthia came slowly in. The breeze blew a piece of paper off the scrap-basket to her feet, and she stooped and picked it up.

"Here," she said.

"Oh, throw it away," Kate answered, carelessly, "it's some trees at my home. I was trying to remember how they looked."

But Cynthia folded the paper and put it in her pocket.

"There," said Johnny Bennett, explosively, "is that right this time?"

Kate glanced down the irregular rows. "Yes, you can go," she answered.

Johnny Bennett went to the nail on which hung his solitary cap. As he went out of the door he looked back with a grin. His release brought back his good nature. "I ain't never going to say scissors again," he shouted, and joined his waiting fellows with a wild whoop of long suppressed spirits.

"I reckon you don't like teaching," said Cynthia, in her soft voice, watching Kate, as she put on her hat.

"What makes you think that?" asked Kate, in some alarm, hoping she had not betrayed her secret discontent.

"I don't know," said Cynthia; "I reckon I knew what you was like from the first." She continued to regard Kate with her grave, beautiful eyes, and did not misjudge her. It wasn't that Kate disliked her pupils or was lazy. It was just teaching. Cynthia understood. She did not like school herself.

"I'm very fortunate to get a school at all," said Kate, "but perhaps I'm a little tired to-night. Let's go on, Cynthy. Will you take my books while I lock the door?"

Cynthy insisted on carrying the books all the way to the cottage. For the first few days after Kate had left the Higginses Cynthy had seemed to avoid her. Kate felt that it was not dislike as much as it was timidity. Cynthy had taken her departure as a rebuff, and for awhile looked at Kate with the startled and timid gaze of a deer that has been frightened. Lately, however, she had come back of her own accord and waited to walk home from school with Kate every night.

When they reached the gate of the little cottage, Kate invited her companion in for tea.

Cynthy shook her head in refusal. "I'm coming down to-night with Ma. She's got something good for you'uns." She went on down the street.

"Hallo, Cynthy," said Mr. Hitchcock, as she passed him. He was on horseback and had paused to give Holly a drink at the public trough.

She smiled in reply. She never could have told

what prompted her to draw out from her pocket the sketch of the eucalyptus-trees, for she could not divine the effect this simple act of hers was to have upon Kate's future. Perhaps it was her loving pride in her friend and the fact that she, untrained in art, yet perceived with the sympathy of her own wild woods knowledge that the sketch was good.

She stepped out into the roadway and handed the paper up to Mr. Hitchcock. He took it, puzzled.

"Why, where did you get this?" he asked, in surprise.

"Miss Kate did it," answered Cynthy, rubbing her bare feet off on the grass. She had stepped into a puddle of water. Cynthy was a tall girl, with her dress down to her ankles, but she still went barefoot except Sundays.

"Thank you, Cynthy," said Mr. Hitchcock, handing the sketch back to her; "I was glad to see it." He touched his horse with his whip, and rode briskly on, and soon she saw him on the winding road that went by her home up into the mountain.

"I guess I'll ask Pa for a horse," thought Cynthy,

with the serene conviction that her father would refuse her nothing.

That evening Kate and Rose May sat working in their little parlour. They had had supper and washed and put away the dishes and set the table for breakfast. Being young, they liked to sleep to the limit in the morning.

Rose May sang to herself as she sat in a rocking-chair trimming over a hat for the practice. It was a Leghorn, and she was draping pale yellow mull on it.

Kate's straight-backed chair was drawn square up to the other side of the table. She was proving the arithmetical problems she was going to give her senior class to-morrow. All her passionate mood of revolt of the afternoon was gone, and her face looked only serious and rather tired in the lamplight.

They could hear Mr. Love practising on his cornet across the street. All their evenings except Sunday, when they went to church, were passed in this fashion. Generally before they went to bed they would step outside for a few moments to inhale the fragrance of the flowers and the fresh air of the

mountain night. Down the street they would see the Louvre brilliantly lighted. Sometimes they heard music, and once several shots fired in quick succession, startling the quiet night. But their life was serene, and they had no fear.

There was a knock on the front door.

"Oh," cried Kate, conscience-stricken, "I forgot to tell you Cynthia said she and her mother were coming down this evening."

"Well, I declare," said Mrs. Higgins, as Rose May opened the door, "don't you look cosy in here?" She came in, beaming and resplendent in a freshly ironed calico gown of her favourite colour, pink. "I brought you a bite of my loaf-cake," she continued, squeezing herself into the rocking-chair. "It was real nice and light when we started, but I reckon Cynthia's held it too close. That child never did have no respect for loaf-cake, nohow. She'd just as soon have a cookie," smiled Mrs. Higgins, untying her bonnet-strings.

"We're ever so much obliged," said Rose May; "I'll go right out and put it in the cake-box."

"I must look out and see she doesn't eat it all

up when my back's turned," remarked Kate, diving into the bedroom for her stocking-bag, in order to do some mending.

"You're just that comical, Miss Kate," laughed Mrs. Higgins.

"You haven't seen anything of my cat, have you, Mrs. Higgins?" asked Kate, as she took a chair. She slipped her fingers through the hole in the toe of her stocking and shook her head. "I hate to darn," she said.

Cynthy rubbed her slender bare feet together with satisfaction. She was seldom troubled with holes in her stockings.

"No, sir," answered Mrs. Higgins, "we ain't never set eyes on the old cat from that day to this. Like as not he's turned up home."

"Don't you want to see through the cottage?" asked Rose May.

Mrs. Higgins was delighted, and admired everything about the little cottage. They showed her the kitchen and the out-door dining-room, and the bedroom, which they had made most attractive. This room had two side windows, and they had put up

ruffled curtains of white muslin dotted with pink and blue bachelor's-buttons. The material was cheap, and they had made them themselves, and laundered them beautifully, so that only the green in the flowers faded, and that so slightly it was prettier.

"I couldn't 'a' done it better myself," announced Mrs. Higgins.

They had made covers of the same material for the wash-stand and bureau, and put pads of cotton under the thin white.

"Our bedspread is rather worn," said Rose May, "but it's clean."

"Land, child," rejoined Mrs. Higgins, "when you're my age, you won't bother about white spreads. You'll get calico, and get it dark, so it won't show the dirt."

They went back into the parlour, Rose May with the lamp. It was their only one. They generally used miners' candles to undress by. These candles were cheap and lasted a long time. Kate said lots of the girls up at the university used candles in preference, and she wished they had pretty holders.

There was a knock on the door, and Rose May,

who was leading the way, nearly dropped the lamp in her fright.

“Who can it be?” she gasped; “it must be nearly nine o’clock.”

“It’s all of that,” said Mrs. Higgins; “Cynthy and I got started right late.”

“Why, we never have any one come to see us,” added Kate. “You’re our first visitors.”

“Why don’t you open the door and find out?” asked Cynthy.

But the other three paid no attention to her. They thought some drunken miner or cowboy from the Louvre had strayed into their little yard.

“Let’s put out the lamp and all keep perfectly still,” suggested Rose May, tremulously.

“You girls stay back,” said Mrs. Higgins; “I’ll send the impudent feller about his business.”

She opened the door suddenly, and the lamplight illumined the stalwart figure of Mr. Hitchcock.

“Well, I’ll be bound,” exclaimed Mrs. Higgins, “*come* right in.”

“Did I frighten you?” asked he, laughing at the three girls drawn close together. “This is a

pleasant surprise to find you and Cynthy here, too, Mrs. Higgins."

"Ain't it?" she assented, genially. "Set right down in this chair, and you girls bring in another chair." Her hospitality made her take unconsciously upon herself all the honours of the cottage. She managed to whisper to Rose May, as she bustled about, "You ain't got no lemons to make lemonade, have you?"

"Yes," whispered Rose May.

"All right," whispered Mrs. Higgins, "I'll help you make it. It's real lucky I brought down that pound-cake. Gentlemen always expect something to eat, my mother used to say."

Mr. Hitchcock had taken the chair offered him, and placed his hat on the table. "You've made it as homelike as can be, Miss Kate," he remarked, looking about him. "What's that Mrs. Higgins is saying about men always wanting something to eat?"

"Land sakes, if you ain't got sharp ears," cried Mrs. Higgins, laughing. "You're going to have

some cake that will melt in your mouth, if I say it as shouldn't."

The tiny room seemed crowded now that it contained five people. Mr. Hitchcock's kindly gaze saw every detail: the glass case Rose May rented from the druggist, in which to display her millinery; Kate's two shelves of books; the unframed pictures pinned on the wall.

"Where did you girls get that mirror?" he asked, with sudden interest, rising to go over and examine it. "It's a beauty. You'll have to get it made over sometime."

"Made over," laughed Rose May; "you can't make over glass."

"I mean the frame," he answered. "That carving is exquisite, but the gold wants to be done over."

So Kate told him the history of it, and where she found it, and he was much interested, and agreed with her that it was strange people should have planted only two kinds of roses. After this, however, the conversation languished. The three girls and Mrs. Higgins were filled with but one emotion, and that was curiosity. The atmosphere of the

little parlour was charged with it. Perhaps Mr. Hitchcock felt this, for he suddenly flung back his head and laughed.

“I see you’re all wondering why I came,” he said.

Kate let her darning fall into her lap, and clasped her hands tightly. She had a feeling that at last she was to learn why Mr. Hitchcock had always puzzled her, what was the mystery that surrounded him, and if he were really a poet as she had surmised.

CHAPTER VII.

In Which the Two Girls Have a Terrible Fright

"I'M going to put the matter before you, Mrs. Higgins," he resumed, "and then you must tell these young ladies and me what you think of my plan. It should please Miss Kate, for it's a kind of coöperative plan."

Kate laughed at this little joke at her expense.

"I do believe I feel for once as curious as Love there across the road," said Mrs. Higgins, beaming. "Speak right out, Mr. Hitchcock."

"I don't believe you know that I am an artist by profession," began Mr. Hitchcock, when he was interrupted by a little cry from Kate.

She knew him now. The year she had been at the university she had gone to an exhibition of his in San Francisco. William H. Hitchcock, — that was

his name in full. How she had stood before those splendid canvases and seen into a new world, had felt unutterable longings rise in her, visions and fancies that sent her home that evening to find her studies dull. There was one picture, her favourite, the return of the sheep at sunset, the illumined dust, the quiet pool in the foreground, the old shepherd, and his eager dog.

Now, she understood it all, why he had said that real things could be unreal, why he had said he would rather a daughter of his should be able to tell the colour of dust than to be proficient in mathematics.

Mr. Hitchcock was waiting for her to speak, watching her closely with his bright, peculiar eyes. He saw that she was all in a tremble, that his statement, which meant little to the others, meant much to her. "The child is an artist," he said to himself. "Well, she shall not starve if I have anything to say."

Kate longed to tell him she had seen some of his work, but she was tongue-tied with shyness.

"But I'm not doing any work now," he continued, as she did not speak, "because I went up to the

Klondike in the big rush that went up there first. When I at last got away there was something wrong with my eyes. I could paint only a little while, and everything would blur. The long and the short of it was that my doctor sent me down here with the injunction not to paint for a year if I ever wanted to work again."

"You must have come near having snow-blindness. Love got it out of you, and he told me," put in Mrs. Higgins. "Poor man! and your eyes look as bright as anybody's."

"Looks are deceiving," rejoined Mr. Hitchcock, quite as gaily as if his were not the eyes in question. "So I brought down no canvases nor brushes, and at times I've been nearly wild at the views I've had and no brush to do them. This afternoon the thought came to me: Here I am loafing around, accomplishing nothing except regret at the loss of a year, when I might be teaching these young ladies something. I wouldn't do any of the work myself. I'd just criticise, the way we teachers do, Miss Kate. I sent off an order to San Francisco this afternoon for materials, and as soon as they come we'll begin

The Girls Have a Terrible Fright 129

the lessons. Now, what do you all think of my plan? ”

“ I don’t see anything coöperative about it,” suggested Kate, shyly.

“ I haven’t forgotten that,” he answered; “ you see I have quite a head for business. For every hour I teach you girls, you are to read aloud to me. I used to get Rose May to read, but she would forget.”

Rose May blushed and hung her pretty head. “ You never told me how bad your eyes were. I thought you were a little lazy, too,” she said, dimpling, “ and I had so much to do.”

“ I suppose I have given the impression of being a lazy fellow,” he said. “ You were quite right not to indulge me under the circumstances, Rose May, but I felt my loss of a year’s work too keenly to say much about my defective sight until to-night, when I realised how selfish a man may become.”

“ Love, he’ll just about die to think I know something he don’t,” said Mrs. Higgins, “ and I won’t let on a word to him. He’s been that cur’ous about you. ’Lowed you were an actor, like as not.”

They talked some time over the proposed lessons, and then Mr. Hitchcock rose to go, but they made him sit down again and have some lemonade and cake. Still all were a little constrained until after he had gone. Then they settled down to a merry visit, and drank what remained of the lemonade and ate most of the cake. Kate's quiet mood had gone. She fairly danced about the little room, recited poetry in a mock-dramatic way, tried on all Rose May's best hats, and put a wreath of artificial scarlet poppies on Cynthy's brown hair, and told her that some day she would paint her picture that way.

Mrs. Higgins laughed until the tears rolled down her face, and she ate so much more than her share of the pound-cake that she was obliged to promise to send them down another the next day to redeem her self-respect in her own eyes. In the midst of their fun they were startled by a tapping on the window-pane. It stopped when they were silent, and began again as they resumed their gaiety.

Kate jerked open the door and saw two figures scudding down the street. "It's two boys," she announced.

The Girls Have a Terrible Fright 131

“ We might have knowed it was them boys playing tick-tack,” said Mrs. Higgins; “ ain’t they the worst? ” she inquired, with an unmistakable air of motherly pride. “ Cynthy, we must be a-going. What ever will Pa say to come home and find us out gadding this time of night? ”

Cynthy walked silent and content by her mother’s side, stepping out of the path into the grass. It was wet with dew and lovely and cool to her bare feet. She knew that Mr. Hitchcock’s visit had come from the slip of paper she had given him in the afternoon. He had not mentioned the sketch, however, and it was like Cynthy to be secretive when he had departed. But she laid away the fragmentary drawing in the cigar-box in which she kept her treasures.

The excitement kept Rose May awake that night. After Kate had fallen asleep she crept out of bed, and sat with a shawl drawn around her by the parlour window, looking up at the moonlight on the mountain, and too happy in the present to dream of the future. This friendship with Kate marked a radiant change in her life. The division of expenses

made by the coöperative plan of housekeeping enabled her to save quite a little money. She had even opened an account in the small bank. Kate's scholarly ambitions had not made Rose May discontented. Her nature was too sweet. Moreover, she loved the work she had chosen. To be a milliner meant not the mere making of hats and bonnets. It meant the putting together of lovely colours, the right selection of flowers, but most of all it meant the study of human nature, the appreciation of different faces, the loving interest and resolve to make every one look beautiful. She had only a few customers as yet. Still fashion was beginning to creep into Green Hollow, so that people thought they must have a change both spring and fall. And Rose May was so obliging that she never charged her customers anything for trimming, if they bought their material of her. But as she said she was not a regular milliner as yet, and she was complimented that people should be willing to wear hats she trimmed. Then her work at the Louvre brought her in a good sum every week, so she was not worried.

She had been left an orphan when she was four-

The Girls Have a Terrible Fright 133

teen years old, and ever since then she had supported herself by doing housework and drying fruit on the ranches during that season. She never enjoyed being one of the hands for the fruit-drying. It was hard work in the hot sun, and she would be tired for weeks after. This year her position at the Louvre would not make it necessary for her to go away. The little cottage was the only property left her by her parents, and as it had never been large enough to rent she had continued to live in it.

She came of very different stock from Kate. Her parents had been delicate, luxurious Southern people, whose fortune was lost by an unfortunate speculation. Then ill health had compelled Mr. Smith to go West with his wife and little girl. There they had become poorer and poorer, and drifted at last into such an out-of-the-world place as Green Hollow. Those were sad days, thought Rose May, recalling how soon her mother had followed the father into the life beyond, leaving their little daughter alone and with no near relative to whom she could turn. And indeed, Rose May never thought of hunting up any relative. Every

one was kind to her, and she found work at once; and altogether, she considered, God had been good to her. She showed Kate the laces that had been her mother's, the odds and ends of jewelry, the fans and little slippers, the white satin wedding-dress, folded in blue paper so it would not turn yellow.

"Mamma had wonderful taste in dress," Rose May had said, with a wistful smile.

She thought she saw a figure pass on the other side of the street. The night was warmer than usual, and she had the window open. So she bent forward and looked out curiously. She must have been mistaken. The other side of the street was in shadow, so that she could not see distinctly, but had there been any one she surely would have heard the steps. She drew the shawl warmly around her shoulders and tucked her feet up under her in the chair. It wasn't much fun sitting up when she was all alone in the house, but to-night she enjoyed it. It was so cosy with Kate sleeping right in the next room, and keeping the bed all warm for her to creep back into. What a merry evening it had

been, and Mr. Hitchcock had reproached her for not reading to him! She giggled. How could she know that great, strong-looking man had such weak eyes? "I ought to be fearfully ashamed of myself," murmured Rose May, "only I thought then he could read if he really wanted to."

Surely she heard a footfall, on her side of the street. They came on, light, shuffling steps that sent a chill over her.

"Oh, what is going to happen?" she thought. The footsteps stopped in front of the cottage. Almost paralysed with fear, she forced herself to look out of the window. There in front of the gate stood a figure, the moonlight falling on the man's shoulders and putting his face in darkness, for he was looking into the yard.

After a moment he opened the gate and came in.

There was absolute silence. She waited for his knock on the door. She would have been frightened less if the person had pounded on it; his stillness was more appalling. She felt something more than natural almost was about to take place. She fled on tiptoe into the next room and shook Kate awake.

"Hurry," she whispered, "there's a murderer outside. What shall we do? Oh, what shall we do?"

There was a second of ghastly silence. The same thought was in the minds of both. The early false alarms of the evening, caused by Mr. Hitchcock's call and the boys' game of tick-tack, had but presaged the awful reality.

"Are you sure?" whispered Kate, listening for some sound.

"I saw him," moaned Rose May. "He looked like a murderer. He may be in the house this minute."

They clutched each other, shivering. The silence was still unbroken.

"Hear the bed shake," whispered Kate, and began to giggle convulsively, although she knew that in another minute she and Rose May might both be killed.

"Let's slip out the back door while there is still time," suggested Rose May. "Here's your dress-skirt. Put it around you, and here are your slippers. I have on my shawl."

The Girls Have a Terrible Fright 137

But Kate was trembling so she could not get her slippers on, so held them in her hand. They crept out into the kitchen and through the shed into the back yard. All was peaceful and beautiful in the moonlight. The two pepper-trees looked like lace-work, with the frosted light sifting through. Kate sat down on the outside step and managed to get her slippers on. She was not as afraid really as her companion, but she shook a great deal more.

Rose May had gone ahead and pushed open the high back gate. There was no house back of them, only a patch of unbroken woods. But they could hide behind the trees. At the gate Kate suddenly stood still. A suspicion had dawned upon her.

"I don't believe you saw anything at all. I believe you dreamed it. Anyway, I am going to slip around the side of the house and peek," she said.

And in spite of protestations she did so, followed by her quaking companion.

For one moment, at the corner, she hesitated, before she could summon courage to look around.

When she did so, she gave a scream of laughter, and danced up and down.

“Why didn’t you say he was a Chinaman, Rose May?” she cried. “It’s our Chung.”

“I didn’t think to,” said Rose May.

The wearied Chinaman, who had established himself for a night’s repose on the door-step, opened his eyes in fright.

“Dear old Chung,” cried Kate, “what did you come for? Are they all well at home? Run around back and unlock the front door, Rose May, so we can get in. I’ve got to find my slippers.” In her excitement she had danced them off.

While she continued to ply Chung with questions, Rose May opened the front door. She had lighted the lamp and held it in her hand. She had stopped to slip on her skirt, and had the shawl wrapped around her. She looked sleepy, and a trifle shame-faced. “How could I know who it was?” she said.

Kate ran into the house to slip on her wrapper and toss the skirt of her dress on a chair, while Chung brought in the two baskets he had with him.

The Girls Have a Terrible Fright 139

"What's that in the basket?" cried Kate, re-appearing. A delightful suspicion crossed her mind.

"John," answered Chung, grinning, "him come clawly home, velly muchee shamee, velly muchee no fat no mo'. I scol' him. I bling him back, hey?"

Rose May had gone out into the kitchen, and she returned in a little while with some hot tea and the remains of the loaf-cake. She knew what a tired Chinaman would like, and she longed to show kindness to any one belonging to Kate. Chung was grateful for the tea. He was almost exhausted, for he had walked all the way from home, and John was no light burden. Kate had taken the old cat out, and held him in her lap. Her face was beaming. It seemed so good to see Chung.

"Who makee cake?" said Chung. "No good."

"Why, don't you like it?" cried Kate. "A friend made it."

But Chung pushed the plate away. "No good," he said, crossly. The real truth was that he recognised it was excellent cake, and he was jealous. In the smaller basket he brought was a citron pound-cake of his own making.

He got up and poured himself out a second cup of tea. "Ma not know I go," he said, slyly, and Kate laughed, in spite of her disapproval. Chung had acted like a bad boy.

"I nu'se John," he went on. "When he well, I go to Ma's desk where she keep you lettah. I lead when she not see. You say you live in velly lil' house, all flowers with flower-gal. You call her Missee Lose, ha, ha," laughed Chung. "I see the lil' house to mysel'. I cook and bake foh two days. I leave lettah foh Ma. It say, I tek John to Missee Kate. Sometime I be back. Two days I t'ink. Zat all, ha, ha."

Chung and John slept in the kitchen that night, and when she woke the next morning it was some time before Kate could realise that she wasn't at home. For she heard Chung in the shed singing one of his queer singsong Chinese melodies, as he prepared breakfast. He had found the eggs and flour, and made them the best omelette he ever made, and some light biscuit, and baked pears and coffee.

"I never had such a good breakfast," said Rose May. "Don't you feel perfectly elegant, Kate?"

CHAPTER VIII.

Kate Decides to Become an Artist

KATE sent Chung and John home that day, but not until the early afternoon, as a ranchman who was going in that direction could take them most of the way. And she did not for a moment think of letting the faithful fellow trudge back on foot. While the two girls were at their respective duties, he swept and dusted the entire cottage, washed the windows, and made up a batch of bread and a jar of cookies. Finally he went out into the front yard to pick a bouquet for the dinner-table. John followed at his heels.

Some one paused at the gate and said: "If there isn't that Chinaman with his familiar devil."

Chung looked up and recognised the stranger who had come to the farmhouse with the rains. He remembered the bright gold piece. "Hullo," he

said, and stood, grinning, a pleasant homely figure, the bright flowers in his hands, the cat at his heels.

"Have you come to stay?" asked the artist, thinking his young ladies were becoming quite elegant if they were going to keep a Chinese cook. He laughed out heartily. The two girls amused him not a little.

"Hullo," Chung repeated, grinning sympathetically. He hadn't understood the artist's question.

Mr. Hitchcock repeated it.

Chung grinned more than ever.

"Missee Kate, she say, 'Go back.' She not likee John. Him all samee fiend. She not care. Missee Kate she velly like her ma. She say likee this," here Chung stamped his foot, "'Chung, you takee John home.' So John he come home long time. I nu'se him. Him velly sick. See." He lifted up the cat to show how loose his fur was on him.

"Don't bring any sick cat near me," warned Mr. Hitchcock, "or I'll wring its neck. How did you ever find your way here?"

"Missee Kate write her ma she live with flower-

gal, Missee Lose, ha, ha," laughed Chung, delighted with his cleverness.

"I guess you're a pretty good boy," said the artist; "see if you can catch this. It will help take you back to China some day. And I'll give you another piece if you'll wring that cat's neck."

Chung put the gold piece in the pocket of his blue blouse. He knew the artist was jesting when he spoke of killing John. He not only loved John, but he knew, further, that there was an evil spirit in the old cat which would haunt him, the master, if John were to die. Then what would avail all the gold pieces in the world if a ghost tormented him? So he shook his head, and watched the giver of the gold piece gratefully as he strolled. He looked again at the yellow coin, which glittered in the sunlight. Sometime, when Missee Kate was married, he, Chung, was going back to China to spend a year with his friends. Then he was coming back to serve his young mistress the rest of his days.

Mr. Hitchcock walked on, thinking of the inmates of the cottage. He was touched by the whole affair, the two plucky girls, the faithful Chinaman.

"I shall paint better for this enforced rest in Green Hollow," he said to himself; "it has done me good to get outside of myself, and learn to know these children."

Kate would have been surprised and quite mortified could she have known that the artist classed her, the school-teacher, as among the children. She was sorry to see Chung go, and the homesick tears came to her eyes as he made his preparations to go. Chung, however, was blissful. He had had his holiday, and was now content to return to his work on the ranch. He did not even fear the broomstick. Mrs. Whitney was easier-going than she used to be. California had conquered the strenuous New England spirit. Sometimes Mrs. Whitney thought she was losing her ambition and growing slack.

"I really would keep John if he would stay with me," said Kate, not wishing Chung to think her ungrateful, "but you know he will run back to you."

Chung answered with his guileless laughter. He was willing to give John up to his young mistress, but he was happy and proud that the old cat chose to stay with him. He was taking home flower-cut-

tings in the basket in which he had brought the cake. That noon Kate had gone across to the store which combined the post-office, drug-store, and dry-goods department and made some purchases with Rose May to advise her. She was all in a glow with the happiness of giving. For her mother she bought a cake of fine soap and an ounce bottle of perfume. It was violet and quite powerful, the clerk told her. She found a pretty dark blue and white tie for her father, and for Chung a new blouse and trousers of denim. Then she was extravagant enough to buy a small keg of ripe olives, which had just been received by Mr. Love. She knew what a treat they would be on the ranch. Rose May, too, became infected with the spirit of giving, and charged to her account with Mr. Love a small jar of preserved ginger for Chung, and sent Mrs. Whitney a piece of old lace that had been her mother's. And neither she nor Mrs. Whitney knew what a rare design the lace had, nor its value.

It was nearly ten days before Mr. Hitchcock's order to San Francisco was received. The Saturday following its arrival, he came out from the Louvre

to meet the three girls as they came along the street. His arm was thrust through three light camp-stools. In the other hand he carried three pads of paper, and from his pockets protruded the top of a big bottle of water and a large black tin case.

"Well, young ladies," he remarked, "I see you're on time to the minute. Where's your mother, Cynthia? I thought she was coming."

"She said to tell you she was coming to look on next time. She's got company," answered Cynthia.

The four had gone only a little way when a yell reached their ears.

Back of them came Jenny and Bobby. Even at that distance they could distinguish the cross expression of Bobby's face. He was hurrying along so fast that he almost fell over himself. Then he would stop to catch his breath that he might give a yell of rage after Cynthia.

"He's got an awful temper, Bobby has," said she, calmly, "we'd best wait."

"Oh, dear," murmured Kate, who thought she had enough of children all week long.

“Let them come,” said Rose May, “I’ll look after them.”

Cynthy gave her a grateful look. She loved Kate best, but Rose May was gentler.

Mr. Hitchcock piloted the little party to a lovely place in a grove of live-oaks. There was also some long grass following the course of a stream which had dried.

He placed a camp-stool for each of the girls, and gave them paper, paint, water, and brushes. He squeezed a good deal of water from a sponge on each little cake of paint they were to use, and advised them to make their first sketch lightly with pencil.

“But what shall we paint?” they asked.

“Anything you see that you fancy,” he answered, “only paint. But remember one thing. Paint big. See what you select as a whole. I’m going to let you alone to do just as you please for a couple of hours. Never mind that you never touched a brush before. Plunge right in. In that way I can find out what you need most. I’m going to start you in colour the first thing. Drawing is technical, and it

will come with practice, but your fingers must learn to drip colour from the start."

Bobby, tired with his walk and temper, had already curled himself up in a sunny spot — for the native Californian loves sunshine — and gone to sleep. Little Jenny stole softly from one girl to the other to watch the progress of the work. At last she settled down by Rose May's side with her finger in her mouth, a habit of babyhood which still clung to her. To sit by Cynthia possessed no charm of novelty, and she felt the austerity of her school-teacher in Kate, but Rose May filled her with delighted content.

For awhile Mr. Hitchcock lay under the trees and smoked, then, becoming restless, went for a stroll, promising to be back soon. While he was gone, Mr. Higgins went by, stopped in surprise when he saw the pretty group, and asked what they were doing. He wasn't much interested in the sketching for its own sake, but he was pleased to see Cynthia with the other two girls. As he was going home he picked up the sleeping Bobby and carried him away. Little Jenny rose and ran after him.

He bent down, and she stood on tiptoe to whisper her grievance in his ear. So he came back.

“Say, girls,” he said, “Jenny she says she wants to make pictures, too, don’t you, Jenny?”

Jenny nodded, and the tears overflowed.

“Why, certainly,” said Rose May; “come back here by me, Jenny, and you can paint a picture on the corner of my paper.”

Thus peace was restored once more. Kate had scarcely observed the flurry. She had stopped work while Mr. Higgins was there, but had listened to him with a far-away look and two spots of colour burning bright in her face. She ceased sketching out of politeness, but she did not hear his words. Her thoughts were fixed on the distant hills.

When Mr. Hitchcock came back he missed Bobby, and laughed to learn how the tired baby had been carried off. “Keep right on with your work,” he directed, “time isn’t up yet. I’ll sit right back here. But I promise not to embarrass you by looking over your shoulders.”

Kate glanced up at him absent-mindedly, and went on with her painting. She had a desperate feel-

ing that her future depended on this afternoon. She, alone, knew the value of these lessons from the great artist, and now she worked feverishly. The afternoon wore on, and she had no thought of time, only she could see the light changing on the hills of which she had a glimpse over a knoll between the live-oaks. An expression of distress crossed her face once, as she looked up from her paper to the view and back again.

“Good,” thought the artist, “she sees some mistake in her work.”

Cynthy’s methods of work filled him with delicious amusement, but he kept silent. She was carefully tracing a leaf which she had spread out on the paper. When the outline was complete she flung the leaf aside and filled the drawing in with colour. She had covered several sheets so far with these designs, and tossed them to one side.

For some time Rose May had not lifted her eyes from her work, except when she filled her brush with fresh paint. “What can she be painting?” he wondered. She had torn off a piece of paper for little Jenny, and given the child a pencil.

At last he looked at the sketches, Kate's first. She had chosen that distant vista of the hills. The picture she had made was out of drawing, the sky was too pale, as if she had felt timid about using plenty of colour.

"Did the blue frighten you?" asked Mr. Hitchcock, his tone jesting, but his face earnest. 'There was a freedom and feeling in the sketch that pleased him. And, untaught as she was, she had somehow caught the spirit of the hills as she had in the drawing of the eucalyptus-trees Cynthia had showed him. There was a touch of glamour on her hills, an opalescent gleam.

"She feels the poetry of it," he thought, but to her he said, kindly, but almost sternly, "Work, work, and don't be afraid. Then we shall see."

Kate never quite returned to her old ease of manner with him that afternoon. The artist-master had absorbed the genial stranger. She could never, after she had learned who he was, approach him with the same freedom, for reverence for his work was strong in her. While he turned his attention now to the other girls, she sat silent, her

thoughts in a maze, her heart beating in a rapture almost painful. The future no longer stretched clear and sure and narrow before her, as when her ambition was to teach school. It opened confusedly but limitless in her imagination, and swept her out into a world far removed from all her home-training and early traditions. She did not hear Mr. Hitchcock's laughter when he looked at Rose May's work. Rose May had started out to paint a tree, but left it leafless, though with several branches. All around the margin of the paper she had painted cunning little hats and bonnets in the gayest colours of the box.

Kate had never been happier than in the days that followed her first lesson. Every day after school hours while the light held she sketched. Saturdays she rose early, and worked the greater part of the day. Mr. Hitchcock presented her with her painting outfit. At first she was embarrassed to accept so much from one on whom she had no claim.

"But you have a claim," he answered. "Don't you suppose I was ever helped by any one when I was a boy? Why, all my expenses were paid abroad

by a dear old lady who was not the least relative. So, I try to return what she did for me to some one else, and the time will come when you can pass on the little I consider it my privilege to do for you."

"But if I don't succeed?" she answered, anxiously.

"Don't think about success yet awhile," he advised her. "Remember what I said at first. Work and don't be afraid."

The very fact that he should think it worth while to advise her to work gave her renewed courage, and she began to see that he took an affectionate pride in her as his pupil. She conducted the school as conscientiously as ever, but she no longer spent time in preparing herself for her courses at the university. To her surprise, she found that the teaching no longer dragged nor the discipline irksome. Perhaps it was the secret well of happiness in her own heart when she thought of her future as an artist, and the teaching meant the means to the end. But it was more likely that this new content lay in her different attitude toward her pupils. Mr. Hitchcock's words had made a deep impression

upon her. Why should she wait until she had attained success before trying to repay her debt to him? Kate's fund of common sense and humour here came to her aid. "I'm not going to dream of the future," she said; "I'm just going to be friends with Mary Johnson and some of the rest."

There were seven pupils who came from some distance on their ponies every morning, and brought their lunch. They were Mary Johnson and the three Wilsons, Dick Carr, and the two McCarty girls. With the exception of the two younger Wilsons the other five were nearly of an age and naturally congenial, were they brought closely together. Kate carried her lunch every day, as Rose May took her dinner at the Louvre, and this arrangement proved more convenient to them both. She had been in the habit of eating her luncheon alone in the schoolroom. But one day she asked Mary Johnson to wait a minute after school.

"Mary," she said, "don't you think it would be nice if we could put a table out in that grove of live-oaks right back of the schoolhouse, and all of us have our lunch there together every noon?"

Kate Decides to Become an Artist 155

Mary Johnson flushed all over her good, freckled face. She had thought Kate put on airs of superiority and had been sensitive. She was a year older than Kate, but had never had any advantages until lately.

"I don't care," she said, her pride making her resentful of any condescension.

Kate knew country people, and understood how to take them, and that Mary Johnson's non-committal reply meant consent. Phil Wilson and Dick Carr fell in readily with the idea, and spent their noons for the next week in building a table with a bench on either side. The institution became a genuine pleasure to them all. The two younger Wilsons were inclined to be uproarious at times, but a threat of a licking from their older brother quelled their exuberant spirits. The girls always had a bouquet of flowers in the centre of the table and spread out the lunches attractively. Had Kate been the least bit less authoritative by nature her discipline would have suffered with the other pupils, but she always planned to be through with the lunch before they returned from their dinners at home. One day, to

their surprise, the minister joined them. He sat and visited while they ate, and took a cup of tea with them, for the girls made up a fire in the school-house stove every day just long enough to bring the water in the kettle to a boil. He was much interested in ancient history, and always had something to impart, and the young people were eager to learn. They were not driven to school, but overcame obstacles to attend. Their parents needed them to help in the ranch work, and spared them at a sacrifice. So they brought to their work an eagerness to acquire knowledge which in itself should have been an inspiration. But Kate was too much one of them as yet in experience fully to appreciate this fact. She only knew that the midday meals together in the little clump of live-oaks had made them all better friends. She learned to know Mary Johnson, and even promised to go out to the Johnson ranch sometime and stay over night and spend the day. Phil Wilson told her of his ambition to be a lawyer and go into politics. He and Aaron Higgins were the two brightest pupils in the school. But Kate never learned to like Aaron, and was not a little

displeased when she heard that he had asked Mr. Hitchcock if he could take Cynthia's place in the sketch club. Both Cynthia and Rose May had dropped out from the club, although they always accompanied the members on their excursions. Aaron, having established himself as a pupil of Mr. Hitchcock's, never failed to attend a lesson. Kate recognised in him not only an ambition equal to her own, but also the dogged determination not to let any one get ahead of him. He could not bear to be outdone. He drew with intelligence, although with little native talent, and Kate felt that for the first time Aaron treated her with respect and acknowledged her ability. This caused her to adopt toward him a more superior tone than she used to any one else.

"Say, Miss Whitney," he said, one day, "say, I'll let up on you if you'll help me out a little more on my spelling." That was his sensitive point, and Kate appreciated that it mortified him to be obliged to admit it to her. But since he had learned that Phil Wilson was to be a lawyer, he determined to

enter the law also, and saw the necessity of learning how to spell.

Thus it was that private spelling lessons to Aaron became another feature of Kate's existence in Green Hollow.

The spirit of the little school became more friendly and pleasant, and one merry incident brought them together in better comradeship than ever. A Hallowe'en picnic was given, and they were to have supper in the woods. Then it was that Phil Wilson proposed the girls shouldn't do anything but let the boys make the coffee and get out the picnic lunch.

Rose May had been invited, and she came, with a basket of sugar tarts of her own making. The boys made a fire, and put on the big coffee-pot. It was not long before it began to boil.

"Don't you think it ought to be done?" asked Kate, anxiously, after awhile. "I'm sure it's been boiling over ten minutes."

"I can actually hear the water bumping around in the pot," said Mary Johnson, so solemnly that both Rose May and Kate laughed.

Another ten minutes went by, and the steam con-

tinued to rush out of the spout. Kate's imperious nature could keep quiet no longer:

"Phil, Phil Wilson," she called, "the coffee ought to be stirred down and set aside to settle."

"All right," he said, a little doubtfully, "if you think it's done. Here, fellows, lend me that bread-knife. I've got to stir it down. If it ain't good the girls won't think much of us as cooks."

He drew off the big tin coffee-pot, and taking off the cover, thrust down the knife. At the first stir he stopped, and amazement spread over his face. "There's something in here," he said, "wait till the steam gets off."

There was, indeed, something in the coffee-pot! There were cups and saucers and oranges and napkins boiling along with the coffee. The boys had put the water and coffee in, without looking to see if anything had been packed in the big, battered tin.

And although their supper lacked coffee, it was merrier under the circumstances than if they had had it.

CHAPTER IX.

Dickens in Green Hollow

THE most delightful feature of the whole year, however, was the bargain Mr. Hitchcock made that he should be read aloud to. On Monday, Friday, and Saturday, her free evenings, Kate read aloud a novel of the artist's own choosing. He was an Englishman, and loved his Dickens. So he sent to San Francisco for an edition of his favourite author, and the first book they read was "Pickwick Papers." He was the only one who had ever read it. It was a happy group that gathered in the little parlour. There was first the artist, sitting in the darkest corner to avoid the direct rays of the lamp. He had asked Rose May if she minded his cigar, and although she thought sadly of her lace curtains tobacco-scented, the spirit of hospitality was too strong in her for her to do aught but smile her

consent. The first time Kate nearly betrayed them both by giggling at the secret distress of her friend.

Then Mrs. Higgins always came down with Cynthy. Not one of them enjoyed the reading, perhaps, quite as much as she. She laughed and wept as the pages were turned, and went home at the end of the evening in a dew of emotion, and when they came to that part of the book in which the debtors' prison was described, she could not be comforted until Mr. Hitchcock had assured her again and again that the evil no more existed.

"It just seems as if heaven couldn't make it all up to them poor souls for having such a hard time on earth, don't it?" she said.

Cynthy had remained quiet during this interruption, but some instinct caused Kate to turn and look at her.

"Cynthy's frightened," she cried. "Why, Cynthy!" for Cynthy had turned and hidden her face in the pillow on the sofa.

They were all very much touched when she told them what had frightened her. "I ain't never

thought of a prison before," she said. "There ain't any prisons here in the mountains."

So Mr. Hitchcock, realising what an exceedingly tender-hearted company he had gathered, took the book from Kate and turned over the pages until he came to a merrier part.

They did not happen to make a note of the fact that the cornet across the street was quiet these nights, until, this particular evening, they heard an irresistible titter join in with their own laughter.

Rose May ran to the door, which they generally left a little open for air. There on the step sat Mr. Love.

"If that ain't like you, Love," cried Mrs. Higgins, "you always was cur'ous as a cow. But come in. I guess the girls won't mind, will you, girls?"

"Come in," called Mr. Hitchcock, heartily. "Dickens is for all of us."

So Mr. Love came in, looking a trifle sheepish, and sat down near the door in the chair Kate brought in from the kitchen. "I kind a-calculated something or other was going on the first night, so I tiptoed across the street, and as the door was a crack

open I could hear just as plain." Mr. Love here smiled with obvious self-congratulation. "Yes, sir, I could hear just as plain as you folks can hear me this minute. After that I kind a-took the habit of cutting across to the step and listening. And I must say you're a fine reader, Miss Kate, though they do say as flattery to the face's open disgrace. Ain't that so, Mrs. Higgins?" He stroked his wispy yellow moustache, and gave an embarrassed cough.

"Stop that there coughing, Love," said Mrs. Higgins; "it ain't nothin' but habit with you. He just coughed his wife into her grave with worrying over him," she added, addressing the rest, "and he ain't never gone off into consumption yet."

Mr. Love's embarrassment at these remarks made him to start to cough again, but he checked himself in time, although this caused him to choke so that the tears streamed down his face, and Rose May hastened to run and get him a glass of water.

After that he was an unfailing visitor "reading-evenings."

A few nights before the Thanksgiving vacation,

when Kate was to go home, Rose May planned a surprise-party in her honour.

She was obliged to take Mr. Love into the secret, as he openly wondered why she bought so many lemons. She finished her work at the Louvre early that afternoon, and hurried home to make little frosted cakes and sandwiches. Kate suspected something when she returned home from school later, for she was not allowed to go into the kitchen, and Rose May, after the fashion of cooks who have spoiled their own appetites eating the left-over frosting, put such a poor picked-up supper on the table that Kate was nearly starved.

The party took place after the reading from Dickens.

Mr. Love came in a little late, carrying a big bottle of olives. He wore his store clothes and a posy in his buttonhole. He said that the olives were to go with the sandwiches, and so gave the surprise away, much to Rose May's vexation.

Mrs. Higgins pronounced the sandwiches and cakes as good as her own making, and wished she

had been told of the party, so she could have brought something.

She helped herself liberally to the olives. "Do you mind you, Love," she said, "how when you used to take me to prayer-meeting, you allus filled your pocket with olives for me to eat going home? Olives come high in them days, and they went a long way toward making me like you. But you was too cur'ous, and so I took Higgins and settled down. Ain't that your Pa's step, Cynthy?"

"Yes," said Rose May, "I invited him to the party, and he guessed he'd come."

Cynthy ran to the door and dragged him in. He entered, feeling a trifle foolish over his appearance in society, but he hadn't known how to refuse the invitation so genuinely given. He dropped a paper-bag on the table, as he took his seat on the lounge beside his daughter. "Thought you'd like some gum-drops," he remarked. The bag really contained chocolate creams, but to Mr. Higgins all candy came under the general head of gum-drops. To his surprise, he found he enjoyed the evening, and

for the first time in many years he and Mrs. Higgins walked home from a party together.

The next day Kate was surprised to see Mr. Higgins enter the schoolroom door. Aaron, who heard the steps of some visitor, was too absorbed with a pencil and paper to look up until the heavy steps stopped back of him, and with a start he recognised his father. He put his hand over the paper too late to conceal what he had been making. It was a sketch of his teacher, with a nose turned up in exaggerated fashion, as she looked scornfully at a pair of giant scissors. The story of Kate's discipline had reached the amused ears of the school-board, of which Mr. Higgins was a member. It did not take any weight from Aaron's mind that his father passed on without a word.

He took the chair Kate drew forth for him, and sat on the platform, listening with interest to the class that was then reciting. Kate thought his visit was one of inspection, and was thankful that the class did well. Once a month a member of the school-board would drop in at the most unexpected time to pay a visit. Bobby, who came to school,

although he was not of age, and sat next to Jenny with a primer held upside down, or else scratched busily on his little slate, smiled at his father steadily. He had been too well disciplined by Kate to dare speaking or going up to his father, so he continued to smile, knowing that would not be questioned. Cynthia, after her first grave regard, turned her full attention to the geography recitation.

When school was dismissed, Mr. Higgins remained seated, to Kate's surprise.

"Go right along, Cynthia," he said, as the girl lingered, "and as for you, Aaron, you may bring that picture you was making, out to me in the grape-arbour when I get home."

"I'd like to lick Pa myself," said Aaron, furiously, as he and Billy went off with the rest of the boys. They all knew Aaron was going to get a whipping.

"Let's see what you got?" they asked, crowding around him.

"No, I won't," he said, angrily, thrusting the paper in a crumpled ball into his pocket. "Go 'way unless you want to fight."

"I wish there was just Ma," said Billy, as he

and his brother went off alone. "Pa, he don't care nothin' for any of us except just Cynthy. And she's awful dumb."

Aaron kicked up the dust in a rage as he hurried on. Mingling with his anger with his father was his own sense of guilt. He knew he hadn't played fair with Kate. He had promised to "let up on her," as he expressed it, if she taught him to spell better, and he had broken his promise. He drew the sketch in order to show it to the boys afterwards and have some fun.

Still he did show it to Billy, and in a way was consoled by his brother's appreciative giggle, and he couldn't help admiring his own handiwork. "Look at the nose I got on her," he said; "say, Billy, now ain't it great! But Pa he never could see the fun in anything. It's a fact I'm beginning to twitch already, sure I am, Billy."

When they were alone and Mary Johnson had gone, Mr. Higgins spoke to Kate on the matter which had brought him there that afternoon.

"I suppose you know," he began, "that my girl, Cynthy, sets a store by you, and I want to tell you

right now what maybe you didn't know. I worked for you in the school-board against a young fellow who wanted the position, and I'm glad of it." He brought his hand down forcibly on his knee. "I'm glad of it," he repeated. This was much for Mr. Higgins to say. He was a man of few words. Kate flushed with pleasure.

"I want Cynthy to have advantages," he continued, "and if there's anything you have in mind that'd be nice for her, I just want you to out and say it. 'Tain't a question of money with me where Cynthy's concerned. My boys have got to earn their salt same's I done. It'll make men of them, but I calculate on my girls having advantages."

A sudden, daring thought flashed into Kate's mind. Her bright eyes shone brighter, her lips parted to speak, then closed. Her courage failed her.

"Talk right out," advised her visitor. "I'm not one to take offence."

Kate locked her hands tightly together in her lap under the table. She felt that for Cynthy's sake she must speak. Yet how could she say what was in her mind?

“Mr. Higgins,” she said, with desperate courage, “I wish Cynthy had a room of her own, like other girls. It would make her feel like, like, like,” hesitated poor Kate, “like a young lady.” Her heart was beating fast. There was a moment’s silence in which she was convinced she had insulted him and spoiled things for Cynthy.

“Well,” said Mr. Higgins at last, very slowly, “I reckon it does take a stranger to come in and see what’s needed in a house. All right, Miss Kate. Much obliged.”

He shook hands with her and nodded. Kate knew there would be no doubt about Cynthy getting her room.

“But, oh, how terrible for me to say it,” she said to herself, as with her cheeks still burning she put her desk in order; “it sounded so horrid of me, as if I were criticising Mrs. Higgins’s way of living. I don’t believe I can ever look Mr. Higgins in the face again. How interested Mother will be to hear all about it!” And then she had to laugh again as she recalled the night she had spent with the Higginses.

She could scarcely realise as she locked the school-house door that she was actually going home the next day. At almost the last moment she had found that she could go a day earlier than she had supposed, and so she planned to take her parents by surprise.

Mr. Love said that Jimmy could drive her home. The little grocer made the offer sincerely, and was anxious that Kate should accept it. He told her he had enjoyed neighbouring with her and Rose May, and would be obliged if she would let him show his thanks for the reading-evenings that way. Kate was fond of Jimmy. He came to school, and was a nice, freckle-faced, red-haired boy, so unlike his father that she was confident he must be his mother's boy.

The day was beautiful, although the dust was great and had sifted into their lunch. But being Californians, so slight a thing as dust, and the fact that the sunshine was glaring, did not trouble them. Kate forgot her school-teacher dignity, and laughed and chatted with Jimmy, and listened to his stories of adventure, for he prided himself upon his skill

as a hunter, and had killed a deer with "the velvet on the horns," which was rare indeed. When she came back to Green Hollow, he promised to show her the horns.

They arrived at the ranch in the middle of the afternoon. There Jimmy remained long enough to meet Mrs. Whitney (he knew the Colonel of old) and to rest his horse before starting back.

That night in her room Kate lay awake a long time, feeling strangely unhappy. Everything at home seemed different, but she realised that it was she who had changed, and not her father and mother.

After the good supper Chung had served with such loving skill, she and the Colonel and Mrs. Whitney sat and talked until after eleven o'clock.

They had little news to tell her, except the way things were going on the ranch, and, most surprising of all, Pietro had married a pretty Mexican girl, and had built a rude little cottage for himself and his bride on the further side of the ranch.

"I'll take you over to-morrow," said her father.

Then she told them of her first experiences as a teacher, and about that memorable night at the

Higginses, and showed them proudly her bank-book. Much of this she had written home in her weekly letters, but, as Colonel Whitney truthfully remarked, the best of letters are never entirely satisfying. "I feel as if I knew them all now, Rose May and all," said Mrs. Whitney, "and how strange you should have found that Mr. Hitchcock there. I wasn't a bit surprised when you wrote us he was an artist. I mistrusted something flighty about him."

It was these words of her mother's which had given Kate her first chill. She had been keeping the great secret of her lessons as a surprise, and had brought home her portfolio to show her best sketches. In a moment she determined not to say a word. Lovely as it was to be home, Kate's heart ached and ached beneath her cheerful laughter and her merry jokes. She seemed to see fully for the first time the worn, anxious look on her mother's brave face, and she recognised a resemblance in her father's face to the class of men who frequented the Louvre. It was the baffled, hopeless, far-off glance of men who pursued the chimera of fortune, always trusting that luck would turn. It was almost more than her self-

control would permit, not to burst out crying when she kissed her mother good night. But Mrs. Whitney divined no tears beneath the smile, and kissed her child with a heart full of content.

“I’m just as glad now, dearie, that you didn’t go back to the university this year. Green Hollow has done you good. I never saw my little girl looking so well and strong before.”

It always seemed to Kate that in some mysterious way she became a woman that night. She appreciated her parents’ dependence on her. She thought of their long struggle, and she wept bitter tears into her pillow. She had given up her promised year at the university. Was she now called upon to renounce her bright dreams of an artistic life also? Was it not her duty to devote herself entirely to the course of preparation she had mapped out for herself as a teacher?

Something leapt softly and heavily upon the bed. It was John. She sat up and put her arms around him and hugged him.

“You dear, good old John,” she whispered, “did you know I was feeling blue?”

She was greatly comforted by this dumb friend, who required no explanation of her mood, but was content merely to show his affection. And then with a very honest prayer on her lips that she might do only what was right, and her arms hugging the old cat, Kate fell asleep.

CHAPTER X.

Kate's Ship Comes In

BUT Kate told her mother, after all. She could not conceal anything from that loving heart. It was a hard blow to Mrs. Whitney, harder even than her daughter realised. She feared her child was developing the Colonel's visionary nature. Yet she did not know what to say. Kate had always been delicate, and now for the first time she looked really robust. Mrs. Whitney puzzled over this. She had always taken the best care of her, and she was forced to the conclusion that Kate's delight in her sketching had much to do with her condition of health. This prompted her to indulgence against her better judgment.

"If I could only see my way clear about money, I would not care how much she painted," she would say to herself alone, "but Kate has got to teach."

It was Colonel Whitney who was genuinely delighted with the sketches. His mother had talent for painting, he said, but she had had too large a family of children ever to make much of it. "But she was always wishing to," he said, his far-away blue eyes dwelling lovingly on Kate, "always wishing to."

There was one person Kate's visit home made entirely happy, and that was Chung.

She made a little pencil-sketch of John, and by happy fortune caught the old cat's expression. Chung was delighted as a child, and ever after counted the drawing among his treasures.

Monday she returned to Green Hollow. The Colonel drove her back Sunday. Mrs. Whitney had promised to come and make a visit in the little cottage as soon as she was through preserving-time. The two clung wistfully to each other at parting, and Kate could not bring herself to take that happiness in her father's sympathy with her artistic ambition that she might have under other circumstances. It seemed almost disloyal to her mother. Colonel Whitney felt this, too, and was concerned for his

wife's disappointment. So he said no word of her painting during the entire ride.

It was well that there was much to occupy Kate when she reached Green Hollow. First of all there was Cynthy's room. Every one in the village took an interest in that room, and sent something for it. Mr. Love sent a rocking-chair that had been a favourite with the late Mrs. Love. The minister sent a book of ancient history, to which Cynthy was supremely indifferent, and offered to Kate. Rose May made ruffled curtains and the bureau cover. She did the work and Mr. Higgins paid for the material. Cynthy made but one stipulation in regard to her room. She wanted plenty of windows. So there were four. The room was oblong and built the length of the house. Two windows were built into the side, and one at each end. Rose May confessed to Kate that making so many curtains almost made her feel as if she never even wanted to see a curtain again. Kate had been puzzled to know just what to give Cynthy. She remembered what Mr. Hitchcock had said about the old mirror

she found, and she consulted him about having it fixed up.

"You'd better let me attend to it," he advised; "I know an old fellow in San Francisco who will do it cheap for me."

"Do you think two dollars would pay for it?" asked Kate, anxiously, knowing it was all she could possibly afford.

"I think I can manage it," said Mr. Hitchcock; "we'll get Love to box it for us and send it on to-morrow." He took the two dollars she gave him, and she went away contented, pausing, however, for one more anxious question. "You think it's worth while spending that much on it?"

"Indeed, I do," he said; "you trust me, Miss Kate. I know."

"I did think the glass itself was rather dull," she ventured.

"Oh, the glass isn't worth anything," he said, "it's the frame." Which answer puzzled her not a little.

From thus enlarging his room to the extent of one room, Mr. Higgins became ambitious, and built

on a parlour to the front, and an extra bedroom on the other side for the boys.

Mrs. Higgins was much amused by these proceedings, and it puzzled Kate to observe that she seemed quite as unconcerned as if it were not her home. She would sit in her pink calico, rocking back and forth hours at a time, as she visited with the carpenter.

"I never interfere with Higgins," she told Kate; "'tain't none of my business. He knows if he's got the money for this here extravagance." To every one's surprise she had taken to reading. Mr. Hitchcock had presented her with his set of Dickens, and she passed many happy afternoons while the children were at school reading aloud to herself. "I can't seem to take it all in unless I hear the words spoke out loud," she informed Kate.

Cynthy's room was at last completed. When the mirror came from the city, it was accompanied by another package. This proved to be one of the artist's own canvases. The subject was moonrise in the early evening, by a marshy pond, with great

trees all about, and in the foreground a deer drinking.

"I can hear the frogs almost when I look at it," Cynthy told him, a world of wonder in her beautiful dark eyes. "I think to myself, there's lots of them in that there pond."

As for the mirror, it came back a thing of beauty, the frame shining and golden as that of the picture. These two things made Cynthy's room exceptional. Then what fun the girls had buying all the little things, the bedspread for the little yellow pine bedstead, the set of china for the wash-stand (for Kate did not approve of Cynthy washing in the grape-arbour or taking her bath in the tub in the kitchen), and a lamp for her very own self. It had been Cynthy's habit to undress in the dark. She and Rose May nearly fell out on the point of the colour of the pad for the bureau and the ribbons to tie back the curtains. She wanted scarlet and Rose May thought pink would be prettier. Finally they compromised on yellow, which was Kate's suggestion. The first time she visited Cynthy in the new room, she saw a small trundle-bed in the corner.

"I thought I'd be lonesome without Jenny and Bobby," explained Cynthy, and Kate sighed.

When Mrs. Whitney came, Kate made her stay a week, and perceived with delight that the change brought the faint pink into her mother's soft, fine complexion, and that a rested look came into her eyes. While she was there, Kate put away her painting materials, and asked Mr. Hitchcock not to say anything about the lessons. She had to explain the matter quite fully before he understood. Christmas came, and Kate was glad of the long vacation at home, and spent her time chiefly helping her mother with the sewing.

"I missed you as much as if you had been gone most a year," said Rose May, when her friend returned. "And Mr. Hitchcock has a surprise for you."

The surprise proved to be that there had been several prizes offered by the San Francisco Art League, and Mr. Hitchcock wished her to try for one. Such encouragement from him made her quite faint with happiness.

And in the spring there came the blessed rains

again, as plentiful as they were a year ago, and the poppies were waving gold on the hills, and another year of prosperity dawned for the country. No one remained home from school for the rains. Never yet was a good California child heard to repeat the old Mother Goose rhyme of —

“ Rain, rain, go away,
Come again some other day,
Little Johnny wants to play.”

Even the babies knew there wouldn't be much play for them if the rains went away.

And Mr. Hitchcock told Kate how to see the poppies if she would learn how to paint them; not to see them as single blossoms, but in masses, in waves of rippling gold on the hillside.

One spring night Kate and Rose May sat on their front door-step together. It was that rarest of rare things in California, a warm evening, when the air was so mild that they could sit out-of-doors. The air was a little misty, so that the stars were dim. A dreamy evening which tended to silence, so that the two had little to say to each other. Kate worked harder than ever these days. She grew thin, and

a restless light was in her gray eyes, and once or twice she scolded Rose May for no reason whatever. Rose May did not resent it. She was sure teaching must be wearisome, and she did not think Kate seemed well. But it was not the teaching that fretted Kate. She was painting beyond her allowance of strength, in the hope of winning one of the prizes offered by the Art League in San Francisco. If she won nothing, she felt that she would have no right to continue the art, but must fit herself for a school-teacher in some special higher branch. Her life was not her own. She must consider her parents. She twisted her hands nervously together in her lap, and gave a long sigh.

“What is it?” inquired Rose May.

“Nothing,” retorted Kate, crossly. “I hope I can breathe, can’t I?”

Rose May clapped her hands over her mouth just in time to stop a giggle. She perceived her friend was in no mood to see the humourous side of anything.

Mr. Love, in the upper window of his home across the way, was practising on his cornet. He was play-

ing "Annie Laurie," and, although he rendered it with many false notes, Kate's ear was not critical, and the sweet, melancholy notes pleased her mood. She had been thinking of some subject for the sketch she was to submit to the League, but none that had presented itself so far satisfied her. How sad and far-away the cornet sounded! She was reminded vaguely of that sad, far-off range of mountains which stretched west of her home. Sadness they had, but also what grandeur! She knew that if she ever left them for long, she would be homesick, as her mother was for the green hills of Vermont.

Rose May was tapping softly with her foot, and humming the tune the cornet was playing. She was almost frightened when Kate suddenly turned and hugged her.

"Oh, Rose May, I've got it," she cried. "I see them just as plain." And then she was off dancing about the yard and back to embrace her friend again. "I was just as hateful as I could be to you. Yes, I was. Let's go over to the post-office and have some cream-pop."

There was no soda-water fountain in Green Hollow, but Mr. Mather, who was both postmaster and druggist, did a good business in ginger ale and cream-pop. So the two girls went in and got some money, and then crossed over, feeling to the full how delightful it was to be about in the evening without hats or jackets. Several of their friends were in, and the druggist was bustling about to serve them.

“I’d be a millionaire if this warm weather lasted,” he said, pushing the girls’ orders toward them. His glasses had given out, and Kate received her strawberry cream-pop in a thick, white coffee-cup.

The next morning she was up early, painting long before Rose May opened her eyes. The sketch was made many times before she finally submitted it to Mr. Hitchcock for his approval.

“It is the way I remember the mountains that afternoon before the rains, when you came in the evening,” she told him.

He regarded it long in silence. Above all, the simplicity pleased him. There they were, the red and purple mountains, and the white sand was in

the foreground. And yet she had put into the slight work a suggestion of the desolate grandeur of the scene. He said to himself that the child was a genius.

Kate stood waiting for his verdict. At last he spoke.

"I think we'd better send this and see what it will do for us."

To his distress and amazement, Kate burst into tears.

"I'm just a goose to cry," she sobbed, filled with mortification at her weakness, "because I'm just as happy as I can be. I really am, Mr. Hitchcock."

So the sketch was sent away about the first of May, in ample time for the competition. And at the artist's advice she sent a little sketch she had made of Cynthia, all in brown sepia, except for Rose May's poppy-wreath on her head. This last gave a touch of crimson. Then Kate resolutely put away her brushes and paint until after commencement, which was the last of the month. She had hoped her mother could come over for that day, but Mrs. Whitney was too busy on the ranch to leave.

The graduation exercises made an event in Green Hollow. Kate worked hard to make the occurrence a success. She not only wished to secure her re-appointment, but she confided to Rose May that she longed to prove to the school-board that the experiment of having a girl for a teacher had proved satisfactory. She decided that if she received the least commendation, if not the prize, from the Art League, she would go on teaching another year and work at her painting during her spare time. True, she would not have Mr. Hitchcock there to give her lessons, but she had now the start, and her instruction was laid in in broad lines, along which she could work by herself. Of late she had written nothing to her mother of her wish to give up the old plan of attending the university. The consciousness of her mother's disappointment almost decided Kate at times to give up all dreams of being an artist. It was well that she was so busy after her sketch was sent that she had no time for thinking of the matter.

Mary Johnson proved the greatest help to her in planning out the important afternoon. The two girls saw the minister and obtained his consent to

hold the exercises in the hall in which church was held. There was a melodion they could use, and the organist, who was the minister's wife, volunteered her services at the suggestion of her husband.

The thirtieth of May dawned clear and beautiful. All morning the girls and Jimmy Love spent decorating the bare room. They piled pine branches in the window-ledges, and massed in quantities of scarlet and white geraniums, a brilliant effect against each window's background of blue sky. About the platform and the melodion they put only roses and ferns. When it was all done, they hurried home to dress. Mary Johnson had brought her gown with her, in a basket on top of her pony that morning, and was to dress at the cottage. Rose May was in her element. Mary Johnson was the valedictorian, and it was important she should look well. Rose May's skilful fingers arranged her hair, and fashioned the white satin ribbon into butterfly bows, one for Mary's hair, one where her belt fastened, and two for the elbows.

"I'm so fond of bows," commented Rose May, as she stood off to admire her handiwork. She had

on white, too, but with pink ribbons, and with one bow pinned on her petticoat to show coquettishly through the overdress of muslin. Kate wore for the first time the blue dimity with the black velvet ribbon her mother had made her a year ago to take to college.

It was a solemn and nervous afternoon for teacher, pupils, and visitors. The school-board, attired in their black Sunday clothes, sat in a circle on the platform. Mrs. Higgins surprised every one by appearing in a new calico gown of strong lavender colour with white sprigs. Somehow that dress hypnotised Kate, and she would find herself wondering, while the exercises proceeded, how it was that Mrs. Higgins's face looked so full-blown and pink. Then she came to the conclusion that her pink dress made her look all the same colour, so that one did not notice her complexion so much. Mary Johnson, who was a born teacher, had taught the littlest pupils a song about birds, in which they waved their arms like birds at the end of every verse. Mr. Higgins, who sat with the school-board, caught up his little Jenny as she was tripping away, and bestowed a

heartly kiss on her round cheek. Phil Wilson gave one of Webster's orations, and made the most brilliant impression of any of the five graduates.

Then the exercises closed with the national anthem in which everybody joined.

So at last it was all over.

It was six o'clock, and Kate sat alone on the steps of the cottage. She was tired, and her gray, wistful eyes were raised to the mountain, so lovely in the dying sunshine. The chill of the typical California evening was already creeping into the air, and she was cold in the thin blue dimitry. Yet she lingered, almost too tired to move, she told herself.

Rose May had gone home with Mrs. Higgins and Cynthy to have some lemonade. She was coming home now, and with her was Mr. Hitchcock. She waved a letter excitedly as she drew near.

Kate knew it had come, the decision from the Art League in regard to the work she had submitted. She went down the tiny flower-bordered path to meet the two at the gate.

"It came this morning, the postmaster said,"

spoke Rose May, "and we never knew it." She, too, was pale with excitement.

Kate's fingers grew cold with mingled fear and hope, but she summoned up her courage and opened the letter, and glanced quickly down the typewritten page.

"Oh, dear, oh, dear," cried Rose May, and put her arms quick around her friend, who, she thought, was going to faint away.

But Kate's arms went just as tight around her. "Oh, Rose May, I don't deserve it. I don't."

"May I read the letter?" asked Mr. Hitchcock. And it was well neither girl looked up just then to see how bright his own eyes were at that moment.

Kate's head nodded consent on Rose May's shoulder.

The secretary of the Art League begged leave to tell Miss Whitney, that though her work had not received one of the original prizes offered, owing to her evident lack of technical training, it had received a scholarship which went to that student whose work showed the greatest promise. The giver, who desired not to be known, wished therefore



"BUT KATE'S ARMS WENT JUST AS TIGHT AROUND HER"

that she should receive one thousand dollars a year for five years, when it was hoped her ability, well-trained, should make her independent. This sum, with the above conditions attached, had already been placed in the bank in her name.

"I call that pretty good for my pupil of less than a year," said Mr. Hitchcock, with his genial laugh. "You'll have to treat Rose May and me to cream-pop on that."

Kate did not hear him. She was looking up at the mountain. She would be deserving, she would be deserving, her heart said over and over. What would her mother say? Oh, if she could only do something that would repay Mr. Hitchcock for his lessons! Her heart welled over with gratitude to him and to the unknown giver of the bequest. She thought of another picture to paint, and saw the desert stretch out before her, desolate but beautiful, as she had often seen it. Yes, she would paint a picture of the desert, nothing else, but as if it were the sea.

The artist had been watching her, and read her expression.

“Is it the mountains again?” he asked.

And Kate, recalled to earth, shook her head, laughing.

Rose May stood a little in the background, like a rose in her own garden. She was smiling as she looked at the two. In her breast was a secret hidden which she must never divulge. She had guessed it, with the kind of intuition that was often hers.

It was Mr. Hitchcock who was the unknown giver.

“What is it?” he asked, turning suddenly, “what are you thinking about?”

Rose May’s eyes were like blue forget-me-nots in the rain as she smiled back at him. She was thinking that the world was beautiful to have people like him and Kate in it. She, too, could have cried in sheer thankfulness that God had made the world so good.

“Nothing,” she answered, “only it all seems too good to be true, and yet it is. That is the strange thing.”

“It is a fairy story,” cried Kate, with the sparkle once more in her eyes; “oh, it is, it is. There’s enough for us both. You shall go with me. But, oh, Rose May, to think of what mother will say!”

CHAPTER XI.

A Barn Studio

IN the fall Kate and Rose May went to San Francisco. It seemed a long time, much longer than it really was, since that wonderful spring day when the tidings of Kate's good fortune had come to them at Green Hollow. For Kate there had followed the packing-up, the farewell to the friends in the little town, the return home, the tears and joy when she told her mother, and her father's tender pride. The one disappointment had been Mrs. Whitney's refusal to go up to the city with her daughter.

"Mother will come when she can afford it, dear," she said to Kate; "the money was not given for my pleasure, but for your work at the League."

"But there is plenty for us both," Kate had protested, ready to cry. "I don't want anything without you."

“Then you must save what you can, and perhaps it will take you to Paris sometime, for you can never have too many opportunities if you are to be a really great artist,” answered Mrs. Whitney, firmly. She sometimes felt a little sad that Kate was not to be a teacher. She felt as if her duckling had turned out to be a swan, and she dreaded lest her lack of sympathy for painting might separate her from her child, and Kate would look elsewhere for more intelligent appreciation. But when Kate drew a little sketch of her father, and put it in an embroidered frame of her own making for her mother, then Mrs. Whitney gave way, and laughed and cried at once. For there was the Colonel to the life, even to his limp and pipe. True, the drawing was faulty, but there he was, looking out drolly from the paper.

“And, oh, mother,” cried Kate, wild with joy at her mother’s approval, “I’m going to be a portrait painter yet, although I haven’t said anything about it to Mr. Hitchcock, as I think he cares only for landscape. And you mustn’t be sad when I go away to think I am not going back to college, for

I just think I should die if I had to teach school. There!"

Colonel Whitney laughed, and Mrs. Whitney was forced to smile, although she shook her head.

Rose May had remained in Green Hollow during the summer, and worked hard. She rented her cottage furnished for eight dollars a month to an old aunt of Mr. Higgins, who had sold her ranch and come to town to live. She was a severe, masculine old lady, who announced that she came to Green Hollow for a rest, and not to be run over by the Higgins young 'uns. However, she sometimes gave Aaron or Billy a nickel, and once when Bobby ventured to visit her, she shut the door in his face, and when he used a naughty word she rushed out and dragged him in, and washed his little mouth with soap and water.

"I was there at the time," Rose May told Kate, "and you ought to have heard Bobby howl. She would come a month before I was ready to leave, and took the bedroom and made me sleep on the sofa in the parlour. And she made such a point of paying only a quarter of the month's rent, be-

cause she said she was obliged to pay only half the month's rent anyway, as I shared the house that month. Then she took two dollars out of that half, because she said I kept her awake by talking in my sleep, so that she hadn't had more than two dollars' worth of comfort all that month. Wasn't she awful mean? You know it was she brought up Mr. Higgins, and Mrs. Higgins, she once said to me, she bet that was what made him so awful glum."

That first fortnight in San Francisco they did little more than talk of the friends in Green Hollow, and the merry times of the past year. A check for one hundred and twenty-five dollars from the secretary of the League had been sent to Kate the first of September. The thousand dollars for the year was to be made in eight payments, the number of months the League was open. The two girls went to a students' boarding-house which Mr. Hitchcock had recommended. They had not seen him since the spring, as he had gone abroad, and would not be back until the first of the year.

The boarding-house did not prove to be satisfac-

tory. The two girls were timid and constrained among so many strangers, and, moreover, the place was too expensive for Rose May. The first month's board was going to take all her summer savings, and she had not found a position.

Kate went to the League every morning. It was in a mansion that had belonged to one of the bonanza kings of San Francisco, who, finding his house too big, had given it to the State University. It stood high on Nob Hill, and she enjoyed the splendid view that rewarded her arduous climb to reach it. She worked from nine until twelve in the morning and from two until four in the afternoon, and even then, so great was her enthusiastic happiness, she felt that she had scarcely given any time to her work. The girl whose easel was next to hers proved to be pleasant and quite companionable. She said she would call on Kate and her friend, but one morning she told her that that pleasure would have to be postponed, for she was going to New York to visit a married sister.

"My father has been called there suddenly on business, and has telegraphed that he will take me

with him," Miss Blaine said, as she was packing up her things. "I'm really going to please him and mamma, for it always worried them to have me living in a barn, but I said it was Bohemian, and I was going to do it. The girl who was with me last year couldn't come back this fall, and I did find it kind of lonesome, I must admit. When I first saw you, I wanted to ask you to come and live with me, but you said you had a friend with you."

"Is it expensive?" asked Kate.

"No, indeed," said Miss Blaine, folding her easel, "the cheapest way, and lets one have a lot of spending money for other things, you know."

"Well, then," cried Kate, her eyes bright, "why couldn't you let my friend and me rent that place of you?"

"So I could," said Miss Blaine; "I'd already signed the lease for the winter, and thought papa would have to pay it. The rent is ten dollars a month. I know you'd like it. And you can use the furniture for the care of it, and that'll save me storage. The furniture isn't worth anything really,

but it'll save you buying things. Come on home with me this noon and see it."

Rose May missed Kate at lunch that noon, and, after waiting in vain for her to return, started out again to find a position. When she returned home, about four o'clock, she found Kate waiting, hat and gloves on, to go out.

"You walked to save car-fare," she cried, as her friend came in, "and you're all tired out, I know."

Rose May shook her head, smiling. "I'm not a bit tired." Nevertheless she sat down wearily on the bed. "I got that position at Smith & Clapp's," she announced, "but it's only two dollars a week. I wish we could find a cheaper boarding-place."

"Well, we're going right now to see one I've heard about," Kate announced; "I've only been waiting for you to come home."

"Let me fix your belt at the back then," said Rose May, cheered by the prospect in spite of her weariness. "Where is it?"

"Just follow me," said Kate, gaily, "and you'll find out."

It was some distance and with a long hill to climb.

"We never can afford it here," said Rose May, as they reached a block of handsome houses.

"I didn't say it was here," said Kate, "but near here." She turned down a humble place that had once been a broad alley, but was now built up closely with poor houses of the tenement class. The dark little children swarming around, and the women gossiping on the stoops stared after the two girls as they passed. It was a small settlement of the Italians. At the end of this alley was a large stable which belonged to a magnificent old house that faced the street beyond. The people who owned it had closed it up, as they were living in Europe.

"I don't think I'd like to live in a barn," faltered Rose May, with a spasm of homesickness for her own respectable, rose-embowered little cottage.

Kate turned a glowing face, and waved her hand. "Come on."

There was a ladder in front of the door, so that no one could enter the house without going under it.

"I wouldn't go under a ladder for anything," cried Rose May.

"That's half the fun of it all," Kate protested, beginning to feel cross. "The people who lived here had this up just to show how little they believed in superstition."

"Well, I'm afraid," said Rose May. "Mamma would never go under a ladder. Besides, I don't think we ought to board with such queer people."

"You're just spoiling everything," said Kate. "What do you care about an old ladder?" She gave the ladder such a vigorous push that it fell down. "There," she cried, triumphantly, "I hope you're satisfied now."

"But what will the people who live there say?" asked her companion, rather alarmed.

"I don't care what they say," cried Kate, in high glee, waving a key she had taken from her pocket. Then to Rose May's amazement, she unlocked the door, and they entered. They were in a stable, swept bare and clean. There were the bins and stalls and garden tools, and some old bridles and halters hanging on the wall. A stairway led up into the loft, and up this Rose May followed her friend, feeling as if she were in a dream. At the landing was

another door, and here Kate produced another key. What could it be? But Kate was in a teasing mood, and held the door shut after she had unlocked it.

“I’m the same fairy who turned the pumpkin into a coach for Cinderella,” she said, solemnly, as at last she flung open the door.

Rose May gave a cry of delight and surprise.

Such a loft for a stable! The sliding-door, which had been built to receive bales of hay in former days, had been taken out, and a glass window that opened like a double-door substituted. There was an old-fashioned open-front Franklin stove, which the former occupants had picked up in a junk-shop. There was a lounge covered with pillows, and a hammock was swung across the corner near the big window. Near by was a low book-shelf. On the other side of the large loft was the kitchen corner. Shelves had been put up, and on these was an array of blue Japanese plates and saucers and platters; the cups hung from brass nails along the edges of the shelves. Below were hung the shining cooking utensils. About the walls were pinned a number of unframed sketches in black and

white and in water-colours. The window curtains were made of coarse fish-net.

“And here is our bedroom,” cried Kate, opening the door of the room which had been the groom’s when the stable was in use.

This room appealed to Rose May even more than the larger one. It was so dainty. There was matting on the floor, and the furniture was of bamboo. The curtains and bed and bureau covers were in blue and white, and on the wall was a framed photograph of a madonna. There were two windows in this room which looked out upon the yard of the house to which the stable belonged. From these windows they had a magnificent view of the harbour and the Golden Gate.

“I’m thankful you like it,” said Kate, watching Rose May’s sweet face, “for I never forgot how you took me into your cottage last year, and how happy I was, and now I feel as if I’d found this place almost more for you than for myself.”

Here it was the two girls established themselves. It seemed lonely at first, but who could be afraid in a neighbourhood in which so many children

abounded? And if the Italian people did look dirty, and the ambition of the women seemed to consist in sunning themselves, still they looked happy, and always nodded a kindly greeting to the two young girls. Then, too, they were picturesque, which was a great deal in itself, as Kate said. Rose May made friends with many of the children, but most of all with a tiny boy, who shouted after her one day, "I wish you was my sister."

This subtle flattery won her heart, and she sometimes brought him home a bag of candy when she could afford it. One evening Alfonso's father, who was gone all day with his hand-organ, played a serenade under the big window in the loft. He could not speak English as well as Alfonso, who went to school, so he shook his head in denial when Kate ran down with five cents for him, and gave her to understand, by gestures, that he did it because they were nice to little Alfonso. Every once in a while after that, they would hear him play under their window. They were neither of them educated in music, and so they enjoyed the hand-organ, just as they had taken pleasure in Mr. Love's cornet.

Once when the organ-grinder commenced a waltz, Kate started up, and pushing the furniture recklessly out of the way, seized Rose May, and the two had a dance that left them breathless and laughing.

They had their jokes together. And sometimes Rose May got the better of Kate, and then it was more fun than ever, as when, one night, Kate, who had been doing her hair up different ways in front of the mirror and quite admiring herself, asked her friend what her best points were.

"Thinking the matter over carefully," answered Rose May, demurely, "I should say, Kate, that your best points were your elbows and your knees."

And then, how Kate had flown at her, and pounded her with pillows, until Rose May took it all back! They never forgot the fun they had that evening.

Then at night what a view they had from their bedroom window! They looked down upon the city, and the towns across the bay where lights sparkled along the hills like diamond necklaces, and mingled with the stars. Kate used to look over at Berkeley where the university was, and think of the year she spent there.

They had breakfast and supper together. Rose May took her lunch in the café of the big apartment-store in which she worked, and Kate took hers at a little restaurant not far from the League. The second month Rose May's wages were raised to three dollars a week. Kate would not let her pay any of the rent of the loft, and had her way, as she usually did where they two were concerned.

Rose May had many wistful moods these days. Only her loyal affection for Kate kept her in the city. She realised that Kate could not see the differences between their lives, and not for anything would she have uttered a complaining word. While Kate was at the Art League making congenial friends and constantly stimulated to the best that was in her, little Rose May sat in a close workroom, sewing hour after hour. It was one thing to be a milliner in Green Hollow, and quite another thing to be an apprentice in San Francisco. And, while she liked the forewoman, she was too shy to enjoy the other girls, who had their own amusements, which consisted chiefly in talking over the cheap plays and dances to which they went, and again of their

troubles, for some of them had hard times and helped to support a family. Rose May learned much of the sordid side of life these days, and it made her more thoughtful than she had ever been. One could go on being a child in Green Hollow, but in the city it was different. Sometimes she sighed unconsciously.

After awhile, in spite of their occasional serenades from Alfonso's father, they admitted to each other that their evenings were often lonely. They read Dickens aloud, but this only brought more to mind the dear friends of the past year, Mrs. Higgins, Cynthy, Mr. Hitchcock, and Mr. Love.

"Seems to me I'd give almost anything to hear him blowing his cornet across the street once more," Kate remarked, dropping the copy of "Bleak House" in her lap.

"Or to have Mrs. Higgins come in with one of her loaf-cakes," suggested Rose May, smiling.

They heard a knock on the big barn door below, but this did not startle them. Alfonso had formed a habit of coming in lately. Kate went over to the window, and opened it.

The Story of Kate

"Go away, Alfonso," she called down. "It's too late for a little boy to come in to-night. It's eight o'clock, and, besides, Miss Rose May's tired."

"It's Phil Wilson," called back a sturdy voice, and the two girls with a shriek of delight raced down the stairs to let him in.

"We thought we'd just about die to-night," panted Rose May, "we were so homesick."

"I thought I'd get homesick myself," said Phil, as he followed them up to the loft, "but I haven't had time. My, how spruce it looks up here! It takes girls to fix up a place."

"How did you know where to find us?" asked Kate.

"I heard it from Cynthy Higgins back to home," he said. "I had to go back to get a couple of cows from father."

"What an awful appetite you must have! I'm ashamed of you, Phil Wilson," cried Kate, merrily, nudging Rose May, as the two sat on the sofa opposite their guest.

"I didn't get them to eat," said Phil, indignantly, for he was never quick to see a joke, "but

some of us fellows from the country have started up a milk-ranch. All the professors and a lot of the town-people take from us, and we're making money. But we give good milk, too, you bet."

"I hope you'll bring us over a bottle of cream, then, sometime," said Kate. "We'd appreciate it, with our coffee."

"I will," answered Phil. "If you were on the route, you could have some every morning for nothing. I won't be over very soon. I'm a freshman, you see, and have to drive the early route. One of the fellows said he'd take it for me tomorrow, so I could come over here. You see I have to go to bed early as a general thing."

He remained until nine o'clock, and told them his little store of home news. Both the girls wanted to know particularly about Cynthy.

"I only saw her once," he told them; "I didn't know but that I'd find her up here visiting you."

"How stupid of us never to think of that before," cried Kate. "I'll write to Mr. Higgins myself, and see if he won't let her come."

They showed Phil down to the door, Kate carry-

ing a candle. When she was rich, she said, she was going to buy a lot of brass candlesticks.

“Good night, Senator Wilson,” she said, nudging Rose May.

“Oh, you can’t tease me, Miss Kate,” retorted Phil, sturdily. “I may get to be senator yet.” And they heard him go whistling down the alley.

“You ought to be more polite to him,” said Rose May, reprovingly.

“Well, he’s so conceited,” said Kate, not thinking she was a bit conceited herself. “Let’s write to Cynthy to-night.”

CHAPTER XII.

In San Francisco

So the letter was written, and Cynthy came, timid, dark-eyed, silent, as little suited to the city tumult as a wild-flower to a city garden. Her father wished her to go, and the thought of opposing him had not entered her mind. She was as obedient as if he had been stern instead of most indulgent.

“You must get advantages, Cynthy,” he said, fondly. “Get your ma to fix you up pretty, and have a nice time. You might take pianny lessons.”

Green Hollow did not offer much in the way of dress, but Mrs. Higgins bought what she could with a full purse, and Cynthy arrived in a fresh brown and white calico wrapper, and a wide straw hat, trimmed with roses by her mother. When Kate met her at the depot, she did not know whether she wanted most to laugh, or stand and stare in admiration, for

Cynthy was so very beautiful, and yet so like a country girl. Rose May had to be at the store, and so could not meet them. They lugged Cynthy's big carpet-bag between them to the car, and rode up to their corner. Kate did all the talking, and Cynthy answered in monosyllables, or with her grave smile.

"Don't you remember the first night I ever met you, the night you and I went for a pail of water in the moonlight, and you smiled across at me?" said Kate, giving Cynthy's hand a little squeeze, as they sat in the car. "I'm going to paint your picture, Cynthy."

"Pa 'lows I'm the best looking of the family," said Cynthy, serenely.

"Well, here we are," said Kate, signalling the conductor.

When Rose May came home that night, she found Cynthy in one of her shirt-waists, and wearing Kate's skirt. The table was set for supper, and there was one of Mrs. Higgins's frosted loaf-cakes.

"We've been out shopping this afternoon," Kate announced, "and bought Cynthy three shirt-waists

and a gray suit. Her father has given her a lot of money, and I tell her we don't wear wrappers in the city."

"I like wrappers best," said Cynthy, calmly, "but Kate, she don't. I saw she kept looking me over."

Kate giggled. "Well, I like style."

Cynthy smiled. She was not in the least offended.

"The Italians about here have taken you for one of them," said Rose May, as she sat at the head of the table, pouring tea. "One woman called out to me to know who you were."

"I wish I were dark," said Kate; "but then I'd be looking at myself in the glass all the time, and people might think I was vain. Aren't you ashamed of yourself, Rose May, eating the loaf-cake first? Mother always made me eat the substantials first."

They wrote and invited Phil Wilson over to tea the next Sunday, and he came, bringing a big bottle of cream, which amused them very much. He had always had a boyish fancy for Cynthy, and he talked to her of his plans quite to the exclusion of the other two girls. Green Hollow was growing,

he said, and by the time he finished his law course, it would be big enough to support a lawyer. And later he might go into politics. After supper Kate read some of her favourite poems aloud, and Rose May sang several songs in her sweet voice without any accompaniment. Altogether, it was an evening full of content, and four young people, who were all in secret a trifle homesick, forgot it in being together. Phil had grown thin with the hard work he was doing, but he looked well and big and manly. Kate promised to bring Cynthy over to Berkeley some day and let him show her around the university.

Cynthy had come in the latter part of November. The days passed quickly. Every afternoon she called for Kate at the Art League, and these days Kate came home to lunch. She would always find Cynthy waiting on the sunny step of the open stable, as if she were akin to the lazy, cheerful Italian women with their swarms of children. It reminded Kate of Mrs. Higgins, who used to sit placidly rocking, as she looked up at the mountain. She tried

in vain to infuse some of her own energy into Cynthy.

One afternoon at the League, Kate became conscious of a stir of excitement, and, looking up from her drawing, saw Mr. Hitchcock. It had been announced early in the fall that he would not resume his criticisms at the League until the first of the new year, and it was not yet the first of December. He went now from one student to the next, giving a brief but sure criticism of what they were doing. Here he took a crayon and made a few quick strokes by way of illustration; again, he merely nodded and passed on. Kate was the last to be approached, and she felt a nervous apprehension. It seemed to her that she had never fully appreciated before all that it meant to have been his pupil in the way that she had been at Green Hollow. When he at last reached her, he did not seem at all surprised to find her there, but shook hands cordially, and directed his attention immediately to her drawing. Then he moved on. Kate was vaguely hurt. He had not even inquired for Rose May, nor asked where they were living. He was looking better

than when she last saw him, and the bright level gaze of his eyes seemed very natural.

As Mr. Hitchcock passed through the long picture-gallery on his way out of the building after leaving the class-room, he saw a girl sitting in a dim corner in a high, carved chair. The light from above fell on her dark head, and something familiar in the outlines made him pause.

"It's Cynthia," said a soft voice.

"Why, Cynthia," he cried, crossing over to her, "what are you doing here? You don't mean to tell me you were able to come away from Green Hollow?"

"Pa said as he wanted I should get advantages," she answered.

Mr. Hitchcock laughed heartily. "So you're sitting here making people think you're a picture, are you?"

"No," said Cynthia, "I'm waiting to walk home with Kate. I don't like the city, nohow," she added.

That night Kate told Rose May that Mr. Hitchcock had returned.

"Is he coming to see us to-night?" asked Rose

May, "because if he is we'd better get the dishes out of the way quick."

Kate shook her head. "No," she answered, soberly, "he didn't say anything about seeing us, nor even ask where we lived. He's too great an artist, I suppose, to come to see us here in the city. He wouldn't have time."

"It hurts my feelings," said Rose May, with a quiver in her voice. "Didn't he say just the least little word?"

"No," answered Kate, "I guess he's too busy."

The two older girls were much depressed by this incident. Cynthia did not mind, and paid little if any attention to their comments and speculations. Mr. Hitchcock's attitude made them feel suddenly lonely, and as if they had no friend in the great city.

"But, anyway," Kate wound up at last, in her intense desire always to be reasonable, "it was a great deal to have known him when he had time to know us. And think, if it hadn't been for his goodness we never should have been here, and I never would have won the scholarship."

"That's true," said Rose May, and remembered how she had guessed that it was he who was the unknown benefactor. But she had never said a word of this to Kate, knowing that her friend's sensitive pride might make her give up the gift and all the advantages it entailed. So she smiled now at this memory. "I suppose it isn't that he's forgotten us, but he's other people to be kind to now. We mustn't be selfish."

"Of course not," Kate assented, but she sighed. She was deeply disappointed, for she had hoped to hear about his trip, and of the galleries he must have been in. Since attending the League, she had heard so much about Paris from the students that she was filled with ambition to go there sometime.

"Look at Cynthy," whispered Rose May.

Cynthy sat on the edge of the lounge, looking out of the big window. The moon was shining in, and showed her face wistful and sad. She had not seemed like herself lately, but had been listless and more silent than ever.

"What are you thinking of, Cynthy?" asked

Kate, crossly. She felt out of sympathy with the world in general.

“The mountains,” said Cynthy.

“Oh, goodness,” said Kate, impatiently, with a little tap of her foot. But she too thought of the mountains, the long red and purple range near her home. Oh, if she could only see, this minute, her father and mother and Chung and John! “I think you’re real disagreeable, Cynthy, to be thinking of other things when you’re here with us,” she said.

At this Rose May laughed, and her gaiety restored Kate’s good humour.

“Well, I don’t care,” she admitted; “I do feel cross sometimes. Everybody does.”

“We’re forgetting all about the marketing,” cried Rose May, jumping up. “Had you forgotten it was Saturday evening?”

They were glad of the diversion thus opportunely afforded, and started off gaily enough with their little basket. Miss Blaine had told Kate that they could save money by going to the market Saturday night, when the dealers marked their fresh wares cheap rather than keep them over until Monday.

“We’ll get some artichokes, and have salad, and some slices of cold meat, so we won’t have any cooking to do. And what else?” said Kate.

“Some sweet potatoes,” suggested Rose May, “and some more orange marmalade.”

The market, which was quite near them, was bright and cheerful and filled with people. There was a general air of festivity, and the three girls, after they had made their purchases, wandered about, attracted by the fish-department, the flower-stalls, and the baker’s display. They bought some squares of fresh gingerbread with chocolate frosting to eat going home, and then they went over to the butcher’s to see which of them weighed the most. Once Cynthia became separated from them, and it was some time before they found her. Then they caught sight of her standing bewildered in a corner, too frightened to go in search of them, but looking eagerly at each passer-by.

That night Kate, who slept on the lounge in the big room while her guest was there, woke startled, and opened her eyes to see Cynthia sitting on the foot of the lounge in the attitude she had

been in early in the evening, staring out of the window.

“Oh, it’s you,” she said, sleepily. “I thought it was a burglar.” And her fright being over, she was so sleepy that her eyes closed. But when the cheerful sunlight wakened her, she remembered that white, wistful figure, as if it had been a kind of ghost and not Cynthia at all. She could almost have believed she had dreamed it.

This Sunday morning Rose May and Kate decided not to follow their usual practice of going to church. Rose May was tired, and Kate wanted to write some letters.

“I ’low I’ll go by myself,” Cynthia remarked, as she stood staring out of the window down the bright alley. Most of the Italians had already been to early mass, and they now sat about on their front door-steps, men and women, with the children swarming about. How gay they looked in their Sunday attire! Never had the sky seemed so fair a blue. She could almost see the mountains at Green Hollow rising against it. With the exception of the cheerful alley, the city seemed a gloomy and

terrible place to her. The only place she liked to go to was church. There it was quiet and cool, and the high columns made her think of the deep red-woods at home, and the organ-notes of the wind in the branches and the birds; the lighted candles in the gloom of the altar were like stars.

"I 'low I'll go by myself," she repeated.

"Wait until to-night and I'll go with you," said Kate, looking up from her writing.

But Cynthy was putting on her hat.

"Well, go to that big church down the next street, then," said Kate; "it's the nearest one, and you won't miss your way." She felt a little uncomfortable about letting her go alone, but she was writing a letter to her mother which she should have written earlier in the week.

About eleven o'clock the two girls heard some one knock at the door below.

"There's Cynthy back," said Rose May. "I'll go down and let her in. I guess she was late for church."

She ran down the stairs, and Kate heard her open the great barn door, and then laugh in pleased sur-

prise. In another moment she came up-stairs and ushered in Mr. Hitchcock.

“Well, how did you two girls ever happen to stow yourselves away in this corner?” he asked, staring genially about him. “I declare, you make me think of two little barn mice. I went to the boarding-house where I supposed you were, and they sent me here.”

They made him sit in the biggest chair, and both of them talked at once, eager to tell him all their little happenings.

“And last night we felt so sorry, for Kate thought you would be too busy ever to come to see us, but here you are,” ended Rose May, triumphantly.

Mr. Hitchcock smiled at her. “So you’ve turned out a full-fledged milliner, I understand.”

“No,” answered Rose May, with a truthful blush, “I’m only an apprentice up here in the city. I was more down in Green Hollow.”

“We all were,” he answered, laughing at her. “We had more elbow-room. And over in Europe it was worse and more crowded yet.”

“Were you in Paris?” asked Kate, eagerly. “I

have heard so many of the students at the League talking about going there."

"I don't want you to get any idea of going there into your head," he said. "There are too many of our bright American girls over there now not learning any more than they could at home, and often not having enough to eat. No, Miss Kate, Paris isn't the place for you to go to for many years yet. Trust me in this, for I know."

"I suppose you do," Kate admitted, ruefully, "but you just ought to hear some of the girls talk."

"A rich girl can try it and be none the worse for the experience, but it might bring a poor girl to the verge of starvation," he answered, so gravely, that she was impressed in spite of her desire not to be.

"Did you go to Rome, as you said?" asked Rose May.

The artist's eyes kindled. "Ah, Rome," he echoed, "there is the place for you to go. And Venice, with the picturesque, dirty beggars sitting in the sun, and the sunsets and tall buildings reflected in the water. The sky is like blue turquoise. I

brought home some sketches which I must show you. I shall have to give a studio tea for you young ladies, sha'n't I? And I brought something else from Venice beside sketches." He went to his overcoat pocket and took out a package wrapped in tissue-paper. "I brought home a Roman scarf for each of you," he said, unrolling the package.

Kate unfolded hers. It was so soft that it scarcely seemed as if it could be a yard wide, and it was several yards long with fringed ends. The colours were gorgeous, in stripes of scarlet and old gold and green and blue.

"It's like a gipsy's sash!" cried Kate, delighted.

"That's why I selected it for you," he told her. "You haven't black eyes and hair, but you have the soul of a gipsy. Hasn't she, Rose May?"

Rose May smiled. She, too, thought so. Kate had a wild spirit that puzzled her. Her own sash lay in her lap — in shimmering folds of pale pink and blue and white.

"And I brought home one for Cynthy," he said. "Isn't it time she was home from church?"

"It's past time," Rose May stated, with an anxious glance at the clock.

"Oh, Cynthia walks slow," said Kate, who was standing in front of a mirror, trying the effects of the scarf on herself. And although it contained the very colours her mother always thought she couldn't wear, yet it was wondrously becoming.

Another hour passed. Then Rose May, who had been rather silent, said she was going out to meet Cynthia.

"Why, she'll be back," interposed Kate, impatiently, for she hated to see their pleasant morning brought to a close. And she couldn't quite understand Rose May's anxiety, having no timidity about the streets herself.

"We might all go," proposed Mr. Hitchcock.

So the three went out together, and strolled along, enjoying the fresh, warm air of the sunny noontide.

They went first to the church, and found it big and empty and silent. They came out again, and stared about.

"I guess she must have gone home by a round-

about way," said Kate, feeling some anxiety herself, for the first time. "We'll find her there waiting for us."

But Cynthy was not there.

CHAPTER XIII.

Cynthy

MR. HITCHCOCK sent the two girls home and promised to let them know as soon as he found Cynthy. He telephoned to the police department and then to the hospital. He feared that Cynthy might have been hurt in crossing some street. And this instinctive fear on his part proved true. She had not gone into church, as the service had begun when she reached the building, and so she had wandered aimlessly on, and finally found herself on the busiest thoroughfare of the city. In trying to make her way across the street, bewildered by the cable-cars, she took a backward step, and was thrown violently down by a bicycle rider. When the bystanders crowded around her, she seemed dazed and would not speak. So, as they could not

get her address from her, and she appeared to be really hurt, an ambulance was called, and she was taken to the hospital.

"We could not get her to speak," the nurse told Mr. Hitchcock, "and came to the conclusion that she must be dumb."

In spite of his anxiety, the artist laughed. It was so like Cynthy to be obstinately silent. He was not a little relieved to learn that she was not seriously injured. He could not help feeling responsible for the coming of the girls to San Francisco.

"If it hadn't been for the fact that Kate had such remarkable talent, I never should have advised it," he told himself, as he hastened back to Rose May and Kate to let them know about Cynthy.

He had not asked to see her, for he thought it best she should see her two young friends first, but he told the nurse in charge to give her a private room. Her shoulder was badly bruised and her ankle sprained. In a few days she would be able to go home.

When an hour later the two girls entered Cynthy's room they found her lying on the narrow

white bed, with a look in her eyes as if she were some wild thing caught in a net.

"I 'low," said she, speaking for the first time since the accident, "that pa'll kill that man what knocked me down with his bicycle."

And it was such a different speech from what they had expected that Kate laughed, although a minute before she had been all ready to cry.

"We ought never to have let you go out alone," cried Rose May.

"I can't help laughing," said Kate; "for if you had really been killed by going to church every one would have said you were just an angel." And then she broke down and sobbed. "It's all my fault that you're hurt, Cynthy, because I was such a selfish pig as to let you go off alone when I knew you were afraid to cross the streets."

It was nearly five o'clock, and the two remained until six, when the nurse brought in Cynthy's supper. It was a delicate little meal, but she only ate a bit of the bread, and then pushed the tray away.

"I think you must go," said the nurse, who was

a pleasant young woman. "Our patient seems tired and had better go to sleep now."

So they hurried away after fluttering over Cynthy, and kissing her good night several times. They had forgotten all about Mr. Hitchcock, whom they had left in the parlour. He was not offended at their long delay, but pleased to see their faces bright and happy once more.

"For Cynthy is only a little hurt," said Kate, "and will be home so soon with us that I don't think we ought to write to her father and worry him, do you?"

And Mr. Hitchcock agreed with her.

The next morning Kate took over the Roman sash to Cynthy. Cynthy was looking paler than the night before, and she only had a faint smile for the lovely silk that Kate held up for her to see.

Kate went over every morning and read aloud to Cynthy the week that followed, and went to work in the League only in the afternoons. Then she had supper ready on the table for Rose May when she came home at half-past six, that they might reach the hospital as early in the evening as possible.

At the end of the week, Cynthia, to the surprise of all, showed no desire to leave the hospital. In fact, she seemed less well. Her face and fingers, usually so brown, were white. So the physician advised them to let her remain another week.

"She is suffering more from the shock than anything else," he said, "and needs a complete rest."

Kate alone was worried. "She doesn't take a bit of interest in my reading," she confided to Rose May, "and I can't get her to talk. I think I'll take that basket she was weaving over to her, and see if it won't interest her."

So she did not go to the League that morning, but went over to the hospital with the basket and a new magazine.

Cynthia was lying listlessly on her pillow, staring at the wall. On the table were some roses Mr. Hitchcock had sent.

"How fragrant they are," cried Kate. "Don't they just smell sweet? I'm going to pin the prettiest one of all on you, and I'm going to put this one in your braid the way one sees it done in pictures."

"I 'low the roses are bigger in Green Hollow,"

said Cynthy, submitting to Kate's adorning, but showing no enthusiasm.

"I've brought your basket for you to work at while I read," Kate continued. "Now let me pile the pillows up behind you. And I've the funniest story here you ever heard. It's all about a couple of sailors."

But neither the roses nor cheerful tone brought a smile to Cynthy's lips, and although she sat up obediently and began her weaving, her pale fingers but played with the straws, and after awhile she lay back listlessly on her pillow, and the dark eyes seemed to be gazing far beyond Kate. It gave Kate a nervous shiver to see her lying so quietly, and she remembered with a kind of dread the night she had awakened and seen Cynthy sitting on the foot of her bed staring out the loft window, as if she were a ghost.

The nurse came in to rub Cynthy's sprained ankle, and to take off the old bandage and replace it with a fresh one.

"Does it hurt?" she asked.

Cynthy shook her head. It might not have been

her ankle for all the concern she seemed to evince in it.

“I don’t believe it is really sprained,” said the nurse, puzzled. “I’m going to try leaving off the bandage, and see if it swells up again.”

Even Cynthy’s foot, now that the swelling was gone, looked thin and white. And Kate remembered how bare and brown her feet used to be, such sturdy feet, that wandered untiringly over the mountains. How free they had been until she, Kate, had begged Cynthy to wear shoes and stockings!

“Oh, dear,” thought poor Kate, “I think too much of appearances, and perhaps it was never meant for Cynthy to wear shoes and stockings. Some way I feel this is all my own fault.”

At the beginning of the third week the rest all seemed to see what Kate had known right along. Cynthy was no better.

“We’ll wait a couple of days, and then, if she is no better, send for her father,” said Mr. Hitchcock; “but it’s nonsense to think anything is the matter with her. She never had a sick day in her life.”

“ I think that it’s staying in bed so long which makes her weak,” Rose May had suggested.

“ I believe that’s the solution of the whole matter,” he had answered. “ You girls must make her get up and dress.” He did not think any of his young ladies looked as well as they did a year ago in Green Hollow. Rose May looked a little frail, and Kate was restless and excited over Cynthy’s lassitude. The several times he had gone in to make Cynthy a short visit, she had happened to be excited, and the transient colour in her face had deceived him.

During these days Rose May cherished a romance. Sewing leaves the mind free, and many a dull hour in the gloomy work-room she passed in happy dreaming. She felt that Mr. Hitchcock cared for Kate, and although he must be nearly twice as old, yet that ought not to make any difference. Was not Rose May’s own dear father twice as old as his gentle young wife? And it seemed so suitable to her that two artists should marry.

One evening the two girls came home from the

hospital more depressed about Cynthy than they had been before.

All during the hour they were there she had neither spoken nor smiled, but would merely nod her assent to any question, and then turn her eyes away from them and stare at the wall. Her dumb misery extended itself to her two visitors, until they, too, sat silent, not knowing what to do, and were glad for the first time when the nurse came in at eight o'clock to tell them they must go.

They hurried home. Rose May was shivering when they stepped off the electric car.

"I'm afraid you've caught cold," said Kate, "and if you're sick whatever shall we do?"

"It isn't that," answered Rose May, clinging close to her companion, "but I feel as if the real Cynthy had gone away, and this is only her ghost."

"Oh, how can you say such an awful thing!" cried Kate. "I'm going to write to her father this very night, for I think she's going to die."

They turned into the alley, passed the lighted tenement houses and entered their barn, and climbed wearily to the loft. Kate sat down, and wrote the

letter to Mr. Higgins at once, without taking off her hat and jacket. She worded it carefully, so as not to frighten him, and did not mention how strangely ill she considered Cynthy, but dwelt upon the fact that it was only a sprained ankle.

“I’ll go out and mail this in the box at the corner,” she said; “isn’t it lucky we have a stamp? Now, don’t you come with me, for I know you’re tired to death.”

When she returned a little later, Rose May was lying asleep on the lounge, where she had thrown herself after starting the fire, for the evening was chilly.

“I won’t wake her just yet,” thought Kate, “until I’ve straightened up.” She put a shawl gently over her, and then proceeded to wash the tea dishes, which they had left, and to set the little table again for breakfast. She was so tired that she began to think of the queerest things, and even wondered what the peculiar flavour was that Chung always put in his birthday cakes, and why Mrs. Higgins liked pink best of all colours when it was so unbecoming

to her. What would she think if she knew about Cynthy?

Kate recalled what her mother had so often said about having a prayer in one's heart when troubled, and that it was a great consolation. "It seems to me I've had a prayer in my heart for days that Cynthy would get better, but it doesn't seem to help."

When the table was set, she sat down in front of the fire which was blazing brightly in the cheerful, homely old stove. The reflection was red on her thoughtful face as she sat, chin on hand, gazing at the flames.

"If I could only talk it over with mother," she thought, "for we don't any of us know what's the matter with Cynthy. The doctor and nurse say it can't be her shoulder nor ankle, and Mr. Hitchcock and Rose May think it's weakness from staying in bed. But I know it's something else, and she won't tell us what it is."

She set her mouth and drew her brows together in a way that made her look like her mother. "I'll think it out somehow, just what it is she won't tell us," and her mind travelled back over her early

acquaintance with Cynthy. She recalled the first time she had ever seen her, that first eventful night at Green Hollow when she had visited the Higginses. What a glowing, brown, beautiful Cynthy! What a contrast to the Cynthy, pale, dumb, and silent in the hospital!

She brushed away her tears. If Cynthy should die! And she had grown to love her almost as dearly as Rose May, though there never could be any friend quite as dear as Rose May for Kate. She remembered how many times Cynthy had called for her at the schoolhouse, the faithful brown eyes that gazed at her in such timid affection. Then there were the Dickens evenings when she had come down with her mother, and Kate could never forget the time — the time —

She sat erect; her eyes grew bright.

The time that Cynthy —

“Why did I never see it before?” cried Kate.

She ran over and shook Rose May.

“Wake up, quick,” she cried, “I’ve guessed what it is.”

“What is it?” asked Rose May, in a terrified

whisper, clutching Kate. "Did you hear something?"

"Don't you remember when we were reading about the debtors' prison in 'Pickwick Papers?'" commenced Kate.

"Yes," said Rose May, with a little moan of fright. "Oh, do you think some one has escaped from prison, and is trying to get in? What shall we do?"

Kate gave her a vigorous shake. "Wake up. You're dreaming. No one is trying to get in. I'm telling you about Cynthy."

"You weren't," said Rose May, beginning to cry, "you said some one from the debtors' prison was trying to get in."

"I didn't either," Kate retorted; "how disagreeable you are! You don't seem to care anything about Cynthy."

"Yes, I do," said Rose May, rubbing her eyes, and still puzzled.

"Now don't go and say I said something when I didn't," said Kate, "but listen, because it's awfully important. You remember our Dickens evenings,

when we were reading about the debtors' prison? I looked up, and saw that Cynthy was frightened. Then she told us that she had never thought of prisons before; that there were no prisons in the mountains. That's the trouble with her now. She is afraid of the city, and the hospital seems like a prison to her, and she's just dying of homesickness. That's what's the trouble with her. She's got the same look in her eyes now that she had the night we read about the prison."

"Then why didn't she tell us?" asked Rose May, doubtingly.

Kate gave an impatient gesture. "Because she's just Cynthy, I guess, and the worse she feels the more she keeps it to herself. Don't you remember how Mrs. Higgins said she never could tell when Mr. Higgins was sick? Smooth out your hair, and hurry up and get your things on."

"Where are we going?" asked Rose May, bewildered.

"To the hospital as quick as we can, to tell her she can go back to Green Hollow just as quick as she gets well."

“But will they let us see her so late?” asked Rose May.

“Then we can leave a message with the nurse,” answered Kate, and go she would, although it was then past eleven.

CHAPTER XIV.

A Midnight Errand

THE fog had blown in from the ocean. The electric lights down the hill, as they stood waiting for the cars, were but faint blurs in the darkness. Kate liked the dampness, the cool rush of the wind, and the excitement of their being out at that time of night. But Rose May shivered and felt indescribably desolate. Moreover, she had not the faith in their errand that Kate had. One did not die of homesickness, or she herself would have been ill, she knew, for she longed so at times to be back in Green Hollow that only love for Kate kept her in the city.

Two cars whizzed by within a little while of each other, and neither stopped for the girls, although they beckoned and called.

“I’m afraid we shall have to walk,” said Kate,

“for the conductors don’t seem to see us in the fog, and yet we are standing right under the electric light.”

“I know that first conductor heard us,” said Rose May, indignantly.

A bulky form emerged from the gloom across the street, and came into the light.

“It’s a policeman,” said Kate. “I’m going to ask him to make the next car stop.”

The officer proved to be very friendly and obliging, and was interested to hear they were going to the hospital. He had a roly-poly look and a laugh like a baby’s, and as they waited for the car he told them he hated a fog, that it gave him the shivers, and that he’d like to belong to the day park-police. Kate used to see him often on the street after that, and would wonder what use such a roly-poly could be in time of trouble. He stopped the next car, and when the conductor stepped down to help the two girls on, he gave that individual a genial poke in the ribs with his club, and as the bell rang and the car started on, they caught the last echoes of his chuckling laugh.

"It's just like a gurgle," commented Kate.

They found the big iron gates of the hospital shut and locked. The outlines of the building were not discernible in the fog, and the faint lights in the various windows seemed suspended in the air. A large iron lantern hung above the gate, however, and enabled them to see the bell-handle at once.

Kate pulled it, and before the echo of the bell in the hall of the building had died away, the gates swung open at the touch of a button within. A young man in uniform came leisurely down the steps.

"Another accident?" he called out.

"No," answered Kate, shortly, thinking she never should like a young man who took an accident so unconcernedly. "We want to see Miss Wilson, one of the nurses."

"Can't see her. She's off duty to-night. Guess you'll have to be disappointed, unless you go to the nurses' house and rouse them up there," he answered. "Anything I can do?"

"I have to see a patient who is in Miss Wilson's ward, and now I don't know what to do. I don't

suppose you could let me run up to see my friend for just a minute?" suggested Kate.

"Well, I guess not," said the young man, "unless I want to lose my job. But I tell you what I can do. I can call Miss Taylor, the night nurse, down, and you can talk to her."

"You could give her the message for Cynthy," put in Rose May.

"Why, of course," assented Kate, soberly, her high spirits dashed by disappointment in not being able to see Cynthy.

They accompanied the young man up the walk to the office, and there they sat down to wait for the nurse, whom the young man summoned by touching an electric button. While they waited, he talked to Rose May, whom he thought an exceedingly pretty girl.

The nurse came in a little while. She had been busy with a patient. She was as bright-eyed and cheerful, and exchanged jokes with the night-clerk, as if staying up until all hours, as Kate's mother would have expressed it, were a pleasure and not a duty. Kate drew her aside, and told her why she

had come, and the nurse nodded, and gave her hand an impulsive squeeze.

"I believe that's just it. Did you tell the doctor she was away from home? Don't you know the soldiers sometimes die of homesickness, — nostalgia, we call it? I have been an army nurse, and I know. But these young nurses don't know their business half the time. A patient's got to be cheered up when he's low. You come right up-stairs with me."

"But he said I couldn't," said Kate, with a glance toward the young man, who leant against the counter talking to Rose May.

"Oh, pshaw," said the nurse, "he's putting on airs. I guess we nurses are allowed to use common sense."

Rose May got up to go with them, but the nurse shook her head.

"You'd better not both come up."

So Rose May was obliged to resign herself to a conversation with the night-clerk, and she was so sleepy she could scarcely keep her eyes open.

"The elevator doesn't run this late," said the nurse, leading the way up two flights of stairs to

the ward where Cynthia was. As they went through one dim, quiet corner a long-drawn wail made Kate jump, and the nurse laughed at her fright.

“That’s a little nigger baby. It’s mother is dead, and we nurses take turns taking care of it. One of the nurses has it in there with her to-night. It’s a great pet. Sometime I’ll show it to you. It’s the cunningest little thing, real pinky-black,” she explained. “We named it Lafayette Washington Jones.”

There was something so jolly about all this that Kate felt she would like to be a nurse were it not for her painting.

They had reached Cynthia’s room. The nurse opened the door softly and went in, motioning Kate to remain behind. In a moment she returned. “It’s all right,” she said, “she isn’t asleep.”

Kate went in alone. The light from the hall enabled her to distinguish the dark head on the pillow, and in another second she looked down into Cynthia’s wide, homesick eyes.

“Oh, Cynthia,” she cried, with a little wail of sympathy, “it’s all my fault. I made you put on

stockings, and wrote to your father to make you come, and now you're dying. But you'll get well when I tell you that you can go back to Green Hollow. Yes, you can, Cynthy, just as soon as you get strong."

Still Cynthy did not move nor speak, and Kate's heart almost stopped beating with the fear that her knowledge of the girl's homesickness had come too late. She sat down on the edge of the bed and bent over her, and put her hand gently on her cheek. It was warm and wet with fast-flowing tears.

"Oh, Cynthy dear," cried Kate, putting her own face to the other's wet cheek, "it's all right now, isn't it? And you're going to get well."

For answer, a pair of eager arms went tight around her neck. It was some time before either of them spoke. Then Cynthy spoke, not in the sullen tone she had used lately, but in her old soft, drawling way.

"I 'low as I'd like to be back in Green Hollow with pa."

"I wrote to your father to-night," answered Kate. In the dim light she could just see the smile on

Cynthy's face. Kate was not at all given to kissing, and having already kissed her friend once, she did not do so again, but although she stood up to go, she lingered, feeling most affectionate.

"Well, good night," she said, finally, in quite a businesslike tone; "go to sleep."

The nurse was not anywhere around, and, after waiting a few minutes in vain, Kate decided she was busy in one of the rooms, and fled like a slim sprite down the silent corridors and flights of stairs.

The young clerk was still talking with Rose May, who was longing to yawn, and heroically biting her lip to keep from doing so, for she felt that he was very polite to try to entertain her during her friend's absence. But as she told Kate afterward, it was strange she should feel like yawning when he talked of nothing but terrible accidents he had been to when he was driving the ambulance.

"And when I didn't yawn, I kept saying the multiplication table over to myself so as not to understand what he was saying," she added.

It was after midnight, and the cars by which they came had stopped running. But the clerk told them

how to take a car two blocks away, and then transfer to another line which would bring them nearly home.

As they stepped out the front door, they heard the clanging of the ambulance bell, and the big iron gates flew open to let the wagon come in.

Kate and Rose May, seized with terror of what they might see if they lingered, fled down the steps, and rushed out through the gates into the street.

"We'd better walk home," said Kate, after they had stood still several moments staring about them; "I have forgotten which way he said, and we do know our way home from here if we walk."

It seemed to them they would never get home. Only once did they pass any one, and then they ran until they were breathless, so extreme was their panic for fear the man was drunk.

"I wish we could meet that little fat policeman," said Rose May. "I'm sure he'd take us home if we asked him to."

At last they turned into the little alley, and once more breathed freely. "We haven't been so scared since the night Chung came with John," Kate remarked, as they toiled up the stable stairs to the loft.

To their delight the embers of the fire still glowed, and soon Kate had stirred up a bright blaze and put on a log.

"You get undressed first," she said, "for you're much more tired than I, and I'll get us some lunch."

So they had tea, which was very weak, but very warm, and bread and orange marmalade, and then they went to sleep, Rose May with her arm about Kate, for she felt afraid, although she knew there was nothing for her to fear.

"I wish I was brave like you, Kate," she murmured, drowsily, and in another moment was asleep.

That morning Cynthia greeted her nurse with a shy smile, and Miss Wilson was much mystified until she happened to hear later of the midnight visit that had been paid her patient.

When Kate told Rose May at supper that next day how Cynthia had dressed in the afternoon, and sat in a rocking-chair weaving her basket, Rose May shook her head.

"I guess between you and me," said she, "that obstinacy has been the matter with her, just as much as homesickness."

The day after a tall, rough-looking man, dark-bearded and stern, asked at the hospital for Cynthy Higgins, and when he explained who he was he was shown to her room.

She was dressed and waiting for Kate to come, when a shadow darkened the doorway, and she turned her grave eyes, now such deep wells of contentment. She saw who it was, and fled to his arms.

"Oh, pa," she said, and sobbed out all the grief that had been hers, all the longing, on his breast.

Thus ended Cynthy's visit to San Francisco, and Kate never could bear to speak of it afterward. She felt that the whole miserable episode was due to her.

"Mother always said I was too masterful, and wanting people to do my way," she confided to Rose May, "and I guess it's one of my worst faults. If Cynthy hadn't got well, I suppose I'd have been the same as a criminal, for I'd been responsible."

CHAPTER XV.

Mr. Hitchcock and Rose May

NEITHER of the two girls went home at Christmas-time, for Rose May could not take a vacation without losing her place, and Kate would not leave her. Mrs. Whitney, thrifty to the point of self-sacrifice, thought the girls had better stay and save railroad fare.

All during the holidays Kate worked steadily. The League was closed for two weeks, and so she studied at home, and paid the little Italian children to pose for her. She also joined an out-of-doors sketch club which met three times a week at different places along the docks and shipyards. She had exchanged sketches with most of the members, and pinned those she received about the loft, which began to take on more than ever the appearance of a studio. They went to an exhibition of Mr. Hitchcock's at

his studio, and met a great many fashionable people, and a very charming woman who poured tea and said she would come and call on the girls, when their host told her what particular friends they were of his. Rose May left work that afternoon, and did not mind when the time was deducted from her wages at the end of the week. She had enjoyed herself so much.

Kate saw little of the crowd, and afterward, to Rose May's vexation, could not talk over how the people looked. She wandered from picture to picture, in a dreamy mood, realising to the full the masterly strokes, the splendid understanding of colour. She recalled that afternoon so long ago when she had been a student at Berkeley, and had come to an exhibition of Mr. Hitchcock's, and been deeply stirred, so that study was hard that evening. Now, she never looked into a text-book, and she was filled with wonder at the change which had come into her life. Her good fortune dated from her going to Green Hollow, and she thought with certain awe of all she would have missed had she been selfish and insisted upon taking the money

her father could so ill afford, and going up to college. The pictures which attracted her most were two of the Klondike. The first was called "A White World," and it was a sunset over fields of snow. And so wonderfully was it painted that it seemed as though those exquisite reflections of rose and gold, green and violet, were but the play of an even then vanishing light, soon to be withdrawn and leave the world colder and more fearfully white than ever. It thrilled Kate to look at it, and she could have cried when she learned it was sold, although she was perfectly well aware it was a picture she never could afford to possess.

The other picture was a dreary one of wolves, and as she looked at it, she thought how Mr. Hitchcock must have hated them, they looked so fierce and yet so cowardly. And there was the canvas she remembered, the return of the sheep at sunset, the illumined dust, the quiet pool in the foreground, the old shepherd, and his eager dog.

She clasped her hands tightly together as she stood in front of it, her wide gray eyes so wistful that Mr. Hitchcock spoke to her.

“Is that your favourite?”

She only smiled in reply. Sometime when there were not so many people around she would recall the incident to his mind, and the wonderful night when the rains came after the long drought, and he had been their guest over night, and had mentioned the colour of the dust at sunset, and told them of the Klondike.

The exhibition was on a Saturday afternoon, and so Phil Wilson came and stared about, not caring very much about pictures anyway. He was shocked to hear Cynthia had been ill and had gone home. He, himself, could not go home Christmas, because he had the milk-route to drive, and so he was coming over to the city when he could, for his good times. After the exhibition he and the two girls took a long street-car ride, for it was so pleasant they could ride on the open car. Then they strolled through Chinatown, which was in the heart of the business portion of the city, and at last had supper in the loft.

Phil tied one of the girls' aprons around his big waist, and showed them how to scramble eggs.

"I feel as if I were eating chips, Senator," said Kate, when he had helped them out of the long-handled frying-pan.

Phil laughed. They tasted good to him, and he ate the chief portion of the dish.

"I'm coming over to take you two girls to the matinée some afternoon, for I'm making money out of the milk-route. Too bad Cynthia got so homesick," he said, when he bade them good night.

"Poor Phil," said Kate, after he had gone, "I guess he isn't making any too much money. His clothes look so shabby, and he has been without an overcoat all winter. Father always said it took an awfully long time for lawyers to get a start. And he's just a freshman. But there's one thing, he can't starve driving a milk-wagon, and he looks bigger and better than I ever saw him."

So the vacation slipped away, and the new year came.

Cynthia wrote of Green Hollow. The new teacher was a young man, and he was not satisfactory, and people 'lowed Mary Johnson could have the school next year if she wanted it. Sometimes

the two girls shed tears over these letters, which made them so homesick. One day Kate had a letter from her mother, telling her that Pietro and his pretty young wife had a little baby in their tiny log home. And Pietro had insisted that the priest should christen the dark-skinned baby Colonel Whitney, so that the baby's name in full was Colonel Whitney Pietro Mendez. This won the heart of Colonel Whitney, senior, and he quite gave up his suspicions of Pietro's honesty. As for Chung, he was happier than any one over the new baby, and went to see it every day. This letter made Kate quite wild to go home.

Mr. Hitchcock came to see them Sunday afternoons, and once when they came home they found the card of the lady they had met at the tea. But they were both diffident, and never returned the call, a fact of which they were always ashamed afterward.

Rose May still cherished her romance. It seemed to her a fitting and beautiful ending that Kate should marry Mr. Hitchcock. But often she would meet Mr. Hitchcock's eyes fixed on her in

a gaze so grave and sweet and tender that little Rose May would feel her heart flutter and beat with an emotion she did not understand. But she would tell herself that when he had married Kate, she, Rose May, would regard him more calmly, and forget these strange feelings that had come to her so lately. She was thinking of all this one gloomy afternoon in March, for March can be disagreeable even in California, as she sat in the workroom with her chair drawn close to the window. The window was next to an alley, and the dingy office building opposite shut out any glimpse of the sky. It was nearly five o'clock, and so dark that the rest of the girls had turned on the gas in order to see. Their chatter made a continual buzz, which fell unheeded on her ears, as her busy needle flashed in and out of the tan-coloured chiffon she was tucking. Rose May did not think of her own affairs these days, for fear she would become discontented and so forget how good God had been to her in letting her find a position so readily in such a crowded city. But in her heart she longed for the flower-embowered cottage in Green Hollow.

One of the salesgirls opened the door and put her head in.

"Gentleman here wants to see Miss Smith," she announced. "Says he'll wait. No hurry."

Rose May addressed the forewoman of the work-room timidly. "I guess I'd better go out to see who it is." She had an idea it might be some one from home, perhaps Mr. Love or Mr. Higgins, called to the city on business.

"Go along," said the sharp, kindly forewoman; "you're not as much of a dawdler as some of the rest, and I feel like favouring you." Some of the younger girls, who knew they were the people thus referred to, giggled, and the speaker, as she bit off a piece of thread, laughed, too, good-naturedly. "You might match this petunia with a quarter of a yard of velvet at the silk counter while you're out, Miss Smith," she added.

The big millinery department, with its hats and glass-cases, and the electric lights turned on, was most cheerful, after the gloomy room from which she had come. For a moment she saw no one except two or three customers trying on hats in

front of the long mirrors, and the salesgirls, and she felt disappointed, and jumped to the conclusion that whoever it was had not thought it worth while to wait. Then she noticed a gentleman reading a paper seated just within the cloak-room. It was Mr. Hitchcock, and she crossed over to him.

"Did you want to see me?" she asked, much surprised.

"I'm sure I did," he answered, smiling, rising to shake hands, "but I'm in no hurry. I'll wait here until you're ready to go home."

"It will be nearly an hour," she said, anxiously. "Perhaps you'll get tired."

"Not a bit of it," he answered. "You go back to your work, and I'll wait here."

His smile put her at ease, and she went away to match the silk, full of curiosity. The artist watched her. She looked pale for Rose May, and she had on a black apron, which was not at all pretty, and threads clung to her dress. And he had noticed how her delicate finger-tips were roughened with continual work.

When she came up-stairs again, with the velvet

she had gone to match hanging over her arm, the colour of a rich petunia, she smiled as she went on to the workroom. His answering nod and smile made her heart beat warmly, and she felt suddenly comforted and reconciled to San Francisco, and told herself that after all Green Hollow would be lonely without Kate and him. She couldn't help speculating curiously about what he might have to say, and, remembering Kate's wish to go to Paris some time, she jumped to the wild and delightful conclusion that the artist had somehow arranged to have her go. Fairy stories having begun for Kate, there was no reason why they shouldn't continue.

"But how I should miss her," murmured Rose May, with a sigh.

At last the big gong in the store clanged six, the hour for dismissal, and she hurried to fold away her work and put on her things to join Mr. Hitchcock.

The street was crowded and bright, and so filled with busy bustle that they could not hear each other until they turned off from the main thoroughfare.

“Will it be too much for you if we walk home?” he asked.

“Oh, no,” she answered, “I often do. I like the fresh air, after being shut in all day.”

They talked for some time of various, unimportant things, and all the time she wondered what he wanted to see her for.

“Rose May,” he said, at last, in a tone of voice which told her she was to know, “I want your advice. Do you think a girl as young as Kate could ever learn to love a man of my age?”

“I don’t think you are old,” she answered, loyally, “you can’t be more than forty.”

His mouth beneath the ruddy beard twitched. “I’m not that yet,” he said. “You mustn’t be so unflattering as to make me out three years older than I am. I’m become as sensitive as a woman about my age, Rose May.”

She hung her head, quite ashamed of her stupidity. “It’s nice not to be as old as you look,” she said, and then knew she had expressed just what she hadn’t intended to.

“But I don’t feel young,” he rejoined, with a

sigh. "Sometimes I think I've worked too hard, and my success seems empty with no one to share it. I have often thought I would not sell my best pictures if I had a home in which to hang them, and a wife to love them because they were my work. Then when I lost my dear friend up north that horrible winter and almost went blind myself, I thought I never should feel young again. But last spring I went to Green Hollow, and there I met two young girls. At first they amused and interested me as children, but in the end I knew I loved one of them. It was that which sent me abroad; it was that which drew me home again."

"Yes," said Rose May, in a voice a little above a whisper.

"So I know I cannot seem young in her eyes, and am perhaps a dull old fellow to her, who is so young and full of life. Do you think I should ask her to marry me? What do you think, Rose May?"

It was some moments before she replied. Suppose she had misread her friend and Kate did not really love him. Kate was so wild, so like a witch at times, and ready to flout all romantic notions on

Rose May's part, so free and ever eager for a change. But on the other hand she recalled Kate's reverence for the artist, her delight when he asked her to read to him and thus save his eyes, while she, Rose May, — and here Rose May felt a twinge of shame, — had been so selfish as not to do so. Just as she reached the conclusion that Kate did care after all, and was about to speak, another doubt assailed her. Suppose after they were married, Mr. Hitchcock should wish Kate not to paint, but just to read to him. Rose May's mother had always said the best of men were selfish. But not he, oh, no, not Mr. Hitchcock, cried her loyal heart.

They were passing a drug-store, and the light from the window fell full upon her sweet face as she looked up at him, her blue eyes tender and shining and solemn.

"I should advise you to ask her," she said.

When he spoke again after a long silence between them, it was to call her attention to the early evening star.

Rose May had an instinctive feeling that he would

come in to supper if invited, and so she stopped at the corner grocery and made a few purchases.

Kate had been home from the League since four o'clock, and had been reading her eyes out, she told them, as she greeted them gaily.

"Good luck is coming our way," she said; "when I came home I found a cat in the loft. I wonder how it could have gotten in." She drew a shawl off a pillow in the corner of the lounge, and showed a thin gray and white striped kitten curled up asleep. "What puzzles me is how such a tiny kitten can give such a loud purr."

Rose May knelt down, with a little cry of delight, to stroke it. "That's what we've needed to make it seem like home, haven't we? Did you give it warm milk?"

Of course Mr. Hitchcock must have his old joke about hating a cat, and pushed it away when Rose May would have made him hold it.

"No sick cat for me," he said.

It was the first time he had ever taken a meal with them, and the two girls were glad it turned out to be such a good supper. They had creamed

chipped beef, and oranges and bananas sliced, and hot chocolate and rolls.

“If mother and father and Chung were only here,” sighed Kate; “but I wouldn’t want John, for he’d kill the new kitten.”

Rose May kept her eyes down a good deal of the time. She felt they were shining with her secret, and that Kate might suspect something.

While they washed the dishes, Mr. Hitchcock strolled up and down the long room, smoking his pipe, and glancing critically at the sketches Kate had pinned up. He laughed at her drawings of the Italian children, and this so teased her that she tore them off the wall and flung them into the fire, and faced him, laughing, but with a resentful flash in her gray eyes. This so amused him that his own big laugh rang out and seemed to shake the rafters.

“How can I make up for my teasing? Would you like to go to the theatre this evening? It’s so long since I have taken any young ladies to the theatre, though, that perhaps I won’t know how to act,” he said.

“I’m just dying to go to the Chinese theatre,”

said Kate. "I've heard the white visitors sit right on the stage with the actors, haven't you?"

"Then we sha'n't have to start for over an hour," he said, "as we can buy our tickets at the door."

So they sat down to visit in front of the fire, Kate with the little kitten in her lap.

"Miss Kate," said the artist, after they had all been watching the open fire in a pleasant silence, "this afternoon I asked Rose May if she thought it possible a girl as young as you and she are could ever learn to care for me, but since I have been here this evening, I have thought I was foolish to hope for more than the affection I think you both have for me as a friend. Is it not so, Rose May?"

She did not answer him. She was pale with anxiety. She saw that his words had bewildered and frightened Kate, and sudden fear for Mr. Hitchcock's happiness seized her.

She quite forgot herself. "Oh, don't say no," she cried; "he has had so much sorrow because his dear friend died, and he has to sell his best pictures because he has no home to keep them in, and it will

help you in your art to marry a great artist and — ”
She broke off breathlessly.

Kate had risen, and stood quite still, nervous and distressed, the kitten held tightly to her breast, and it seemed to Rose May that the eyes of the startled kitten and Kate's looked just alike, very big in their faces, and gray and amazed. Never had Kate felt more embarrassed, and this moment recalled that terrible one when Billy Higgins had asked her how many s's were in scissors. What would her mother say? Oh, if she could only fly to her away from this awful predicament which had overtaken her. What if it should be her duty to marry the artist to repay him for his lessons?

Yet how strange he was. He was not even looking at her, but at Rose May, and with such an expression on his face, of mingled grief and surprise!

It came to Kate in a flash, just as she had divined that Cynthy was homesick.

“It isn't me,” she cried; “it's you he loves.”

Mr. Hitchcock rose, as if he didn't know quite what he was doing.

“Yes,” he said, “she didn’t understand. It is she I love. And I’m such a blunderer she didn’t understand. She is so delicate, so young, I didn’t know how to tell her of my love without startling her. No wonder she thought I meant you.”

“Oh, Rose May!” said Kate, reproachfully, thinking it would be hard to forgive her friend for the fright she had had.

It was no wonder that Rose May felt accused before them both, and that she should put her hands over her face and begin to cry.

“It was my fault,” said Mr. Hitchcock, with bitter sadness, reproaching himself for her distress; “it was of you she was thinking all the time. She cares nothing for me.”

Rose May shook her head in dissent.

“But if you had cared for me, my darling,” said poor Mr. Hitchcock, “you wouldn’t have wanted me to marry Kate.”

There was a silence. Then Rose May took away her hands and smiled through her tears. “If I hadn’t loved you, I wouldn’t have wanted you to marry Kate, would I?”

“Oh, little Rose May,” he said, “little Rose May,” and he looked at her in a way that made Kate feel she ought to run away and leave the two together.

So she said, in a businesslike tone, “If we’re going to the theatre, I’ll have to change my slippers and put on my shoes,” and walked away with her head up, and her severest school-teacher air. But when she was in the bedroom, her expression changed, and she laid her cheek softly to the little kitten in her arms, and her heart filled with gladness for Rose May.

She did not light the candles and quite forgot to remove her slippers, but stood at the window looking out upon the wonderful lights of the city and the silver moon sailing far above. She felt hushed and awed. An entirely new and unthought-of experience had come into her life. Rose May seemed suddenly far removed from her, and Kate was seized with loneliness, and the tears ran down her face. Then she brushed them away, for she remembered the great surprise she and her father had planned for her mother in the summer. The

crops had been profitable, and an unusual price had been paid for cattle, so that Colonel Whitney had laid aside a sum to send his wife home to see her folk in Vermont. And Kate was to go with her. As for himself, the Colonel was going as far as Chicago with them to attend a meeting of the G. A. R. He was as jubilant over the prospect as if he were a boy again.

Alfonso's father, starting out this pleasant evening, paused to give a few strains of the hand-organ under the young ladies' windows. Kate listened, smiling, to the humble serenade. The music went in with her happy thoughts.

"All my dreams are coming true," she said to herself.

Down in Green Hollow the evening was so mild that Cynthy sat barefooted on the back porch, the pail of water she had gone for beside her, and Bobby snuggled up asleep in her arms. She was looking up at the moon shining on the mountain. Her face was content, although she was thinking of the friends she missed, content because she had an abiding faith that some day they would come back

to Green Hollow, Mr. Hitchcock and Phil and Rose May, and the most welcome, the most-longed-for friend of all, Kate.

THE END.

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